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Cartoons, clerics and the sacred: on the Western front in the clash of civilizations?

Harry der Nederlanden

Although some of the Danish cartoons are juvenile, most were well within the bounds of what we'd normally consider acceptable. In fact, they are all quite mild, almost innocuous, by our standards. Unfortunately, what is humor or satire in the eyes of one person is blasphemy in the eyes of another.

As the Muslim demonstrations and outrage gained momentum – against the 12 cartoons published in a Danish newspaper way back in September – the violence and destruction spread from one country to another. Nine deaths had already been reported when we went to press, and the violence was far from over.

Under normal circumstances most of us, I believe, would have hardly given the cartoons a second glance, and perhaps thought at least some of them as funny. But no one is laughing now. They have done, however, what many writers and artists used to moan their art no longer seemed able to do. Carry political clout. Arouse passion, even persecution.

Writers in the West used to envy their counterparts behind the Iron Curtain – the likes of Vaclav Havel and Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Their art was considered important enough to repress. Meanwhile, in the West artists tried everything to provoke outrage – from soaking a crucifix in urine to spattering a painting of the virgin Mary with feces.

A great deal of the initial Western reaction to the Muslim reaction was predictably along the line of: "Are these people nuts? All that anger and outrage over a few innocent cartoons?"

After the violence spread, however, many other scrambled to appease or placate Muslim



sentiment. Most Canadian media tended to line up against the Danish cartoons, some even suggesting that perhaps they do constitute hate literature. Would they have jumped to that conclusion before the violence? I suspect that most are judging the cartoons in terms of the violent reaction. Few of them would treat cartoons offending evangelical sensibility with such tact.

Clearly the demonstrations are out of all proportion to the "crime," the offense taken many times greater than the offense given.

Of the 12 cartoons, only a couple struck me as offensive; in fact, I've seen cartoons more offensive to Islam than any of the ones in question. Taken individually I doubt whether, prior to this brouhaha, some of the cartoons would be considered exceptionally offensive even by most Muslims.

One of the "cartoons" is simply a drawing of an Arab leading a mule across the desert. One must assume that it is Muhammed. According to Muslims, it is offensive simply to

depict their prophet, much less lampoon him. Several websites, however, have pointed out that Muhammed has been represented in pictures for hundreds of years, even in Persia. Museums across the world carry such pictures.

But, as far as I can tell, half of the cartoons don't even picture Muhammed. In one of them, two Arabs brandishing

weapons are rushing into a room toward another one holding a sheet of paper. "Relax," he cries, holding up his hand, "it's only a cartoon by a Dane from southwestern Denmark." Another shows a Muslim teacher at a blackboard pointing to a text in Arabic script that calls the Danish journalists "reactionary provocateurs." Hardly incendiary stuff.

The cartoon mentioned most often, of Muhammed with a bomb in his turban, is typical of cartoon satire. The figure in the cartoon could be taken to represent Islam or militant Islam rather than Muhammed. It poses the question: Is Islam violent? Or perhaps: Is the Islamic world a bomb ready to explode?

Two of them show people making cartoons of Muhammed. In one the frightened cartoonist looks over his shoulder and in the other the "picture" is nothing more than a childish stick figure. The latter actually mocks, not Islam, but the editors for their childish PR stunt.

Those who would reduce this

issue to a mere matter of offensive cartoons and lack of editorial judgment are, I believe, mistaken. The cartoons pose a much larger question: how to deal with deep clashes of values in a pluralist society. How we deal with it signals how we will deal with a deeply committed community of faith that is determined that its sense of the sacred prevails over all others. That touches people of every faith, including secular liberals.

As many pundits have pointed out, the violent reaction in the Muslim world confirmed what the cartoons said, namely, that the threats – death threats – associated with Muslim laws against blasphemy are intimidating Western cultural expression and restricting freedom of speech.

On the BBC and in a number of commentaries, the motives of the cartoonists and of the Danish newspapers have been impugned. It was said that the cartoons were deliberately published to incite hatred against immigrants, that they were an expression of right-wing xenophobia. As far as I've been able to determine, that is not true. Then the cartoons would have been far, far more vicious. Then they would have been far more like the cartoons regularly published in numerous Muslim papers (by reliable accounts) depicting Jews as baby killers and America as Satan.

As Barbara Kay, writing in the *National Post*, reminds us: "In the West, satire is a vehicle for social, moral and political correction. Exposing the gap between a person's or group's ideals and the reality of their aberrant behavior,

satire is routinely employed to prick ballooning egos or deride hypocrisy."

In other words, satire and cartoons are an extension of the human capacity to step outside of ourselves and take a critical look at our own behavior, whether to laugh at ourselves or to see our faults and follies – and perhaps repent.

Although CC would not have accepted most of the cartoons, publishing them was not an irresponsible editorial decision. It may have been naive and unwise perhaps, but the purpose was to raise a serious question in a pointed way. In this limited sense, all political cartoons are designed to incite reaction, but that does not mean they are designed to incite hatred and violence. The hatred and violence of the mobs may not, as is too often done, be attributed to the cartoonists.

The Danish newspaper undertook its experiment when the publisher of a children's book about the life of Muhammed, sensitively written, complained that he could not find an illustrator willing to do the pictures. Remembering what happened to Salman Rushdie, illustrators were intimidated by

See Cartoons on page 2...



News

Cartoons continued from p. 1

the Muslim prohibition against making representations of The Holy Prophet.

Let me hasten to add that not all the demonstrations were hateful and violent. There were also a lot of peaceful demonstrations. Those are, of course, entirely legitimate, even commendable. Christians, too, have demonstrated against films and artworks that depict Jesus as a womanizer or worse. Some even want such offences against their faith to be prohibited, so they are on the same wavelength as those Muslims who demonstrated peacefully.

When first published in Denmark, the cartoons didn't incite a great deal of furor, not even in the Muslim community in Denmark. But when an imam who objected didn't get the apology or the government action he demanded, he and some others took their case abroad to Muslim countries. Somewhere enroute several viciously anti-Muslim cartoons were added to the package, one of them depicting Muhammed as a pig, the worst kind of insult in a culture where pigs are considered unclean. So at least some of the outrage was directed against cartoons that were not published in the Danish or other European papers.

Perhaps the Danish imam did not anticipate the furor and the violence that has resulted. Nevertheless, there is little doubt that, unable to apply sufficient political pressure from within the country, he conspired to bring pressure to bear from without. Not understanding or perhaps not respecting the freedom of the press from state control in liberal democratic countries, Muslims abroad have been demanding that the blasphemers be punished. In fact, many signs called for those responsible to be killed or "butchered."

So far the only people who have died have been demonstrators, although the murder of a Catholic priest in Turkey may be linked to the cartoon furor. Two consulates, in Beirut and Damascus, have gone up in smoke, but, according to those who understand the politics of the region, this was probably a case of the Syrians cynically exploiting the situation. The authorities could easily have protected the consulates had they wanted to, said Fouad Ajami, director of Middle East studies at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies.

Although the (belated) reaction



Mohammed preaching, a Persian painting

to the cartoons was far in excess of anything the paper expected, the editors achieved what they intended — reflection and discussion on what has been called "the clash of civilizations" by Samuel Huntington.

In a culturally diverse, pluralistic society, we can plead for a public form of civility in which we all voluntarily avoid needlessly offending one another's sensibility about what is sacred. But if we are to continue being an open and a free society, we must be free to lampoon and even offend one another. There is, as far as I can see, no way for a liberal democracy to pass a law that that is able to protect every group's sensibilities about what they consider sacred or taboo.

Islamic law sets limits as to what is allowed to be said or depicted. But so do liberal democracies. Racism and anti-semitism are not just frowned on; they are prohibited by law. In fact, around the issue of Christmas displays, evangelicals in the US recently complained that "secular fundamentalism" was making Christian displays taboo, at least on public property. More and more pressure is being exerted to restrict the right to display Christian symbols in the public square and to limit public expressions of faith. In some countries, including Canada, Christians must be careful how they express their conviction that homosexual activity is contrary to the law of God.

Many Christians as well as Muslims find the sexualization and sexual libertinism of Western culture offensive to their beliefs. Most Westerners, Christian and secular, are offended by the treatment of women in Muslim society, particularly in fundamentalist Muslim society where married women are required to keep themselves concealed. Orthodox Jews put severe strictures on work and movement on Saturdays. Both Jews and Muslims have religious

taboos relating to pigs and so on.

In an earlier era in predominantly Christian societies observing the sanctity of the sabbath was enforced by public law. If we go back a few hundred years, we recall a time when denying the divinity of Christ or the Trinity was dangerous, at least for a Christian. In many ways Catholic and Protestant Christians were taught mutual tolerance after years of civil war — and they even had to go to school with secular liberals like J. S. Mill.

In short, although we may wish justification speak of a "clash of civilizations" between the West and Islam, we must not forget that there has been and continues to be (where Christians have not wholly surrendered) a clash of civilizations within Western culture between Christianity and secularism. Christians have had a couple of hundred years to become accustomed and accommodated to this constant jostling for position. And they have absorbed many of the values of the secular culture. Until the last half century or so, even secularists held many values in common with Christians. That has been changing, hence, the so-called "culture wars."

Nowadays many secularists are suggesting that religion, Christianity included, is a source not of positive values that enhance human life and freedom, but of domination, oppression and violence. That's not a position that harmonizes with the Christian view, which sees faith as the source of all that is good. Christians, in turn, see secularism as beset with various forms of idolatry, whether of the individual, the state, nature or the market.

Different communities hold different values sacred and revere different symbols. They clash. And in a pluralistic society one sensibility cannot be permitted to overrule or displace another. Yet, in some cases one or the other must

Do not apologize: in defense of the cartoons

The Danish editor who published the cartoons, Flemming Rose, explained that if Muslims insist "that I, as a non-Muslim, should submit to their taboos ... they're asking for my submission."



Two of the original cartoons

thousands of people sacrificed their lives?"

He urged the West not to apologize. "A democracy cannot survive long without the freedom to argue, to dissent, even to insult and offend. It is a freedom sorely lacking in the Islamic world, and without it Islam will remain unassailed in its dogmatic fortress. Without this fundamental freedom, Islam will continue to stifle thought, human rights and individuality."

Daniel Schwammmenthal, an editorial writer for *The Wall Street Journal*, wrote: "The Islamists demand no less than absolute supremacy for their religion — and not only in the Muslim world but wherever Muslims may happen to reside. That's why they see no hypocrisy in their demand for 'respect' for Islam while the simple display of a cross or a Star of David in Saudi Arabia is illegal. Infidels simply don't have the same rights."

Daniel Pipes, a vocal critic of Islamist ambitions, puts it more starkly: "Will the West stand up for its customs and mores, including freedom of speech, or will Muslims impose their way of life on the West? Ultimately, there is no compromise: Westerners will either retain their civilization, including the right to insult and blaspheme, or not."

A dissident Muslim, writing under the pseudonym of Ibn Warraq in the *Spiegel*, said: "The cartoons in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* raise the most important question of our times: freedom of expression. Are we in the West going to cave in to pressure from societies with a medieval mindset, or are we going to defend our most precious freedom, a freedom for which

lose out. Can Western society, for example, respect the Hindu caste system or share the reverence for sacred cows?"

Islam cannot be allowed to insist that non-Muslims show the same reverence toward Muhammed that they do, for it is contrary to our beliefs. For Christians he is not a prophet; in fact, he is a false prophet, for his teachings clash with those of divine revelation.

As we openly state our views and criticize the views of the other, we are bound to offend one another's sense of what is sacred. Everything, however, depends on how we take offence, and on how we express our

differing worldviews in the public square. To shrink from expressing those differences, even in satires and cartoons, whether out of some notion of respect or out of fear, is not to contribute to true pluralism but to quash it.

Fundamental to a free society is the belief that in the clash of opposing truths openly aired a greater truth will eventually emerge — a truth that enables us to live together, if not in true peace (shalom), at least in a facsimile of peace that permits us all to worship in freedom.

Politics

Freedom carries obligations: against the cartoons

Iraq's top Shiite cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani also condemned the publication of the cartoons, but suggested Muslims were partly to blame for distorting the image of Islam.

"We strongly denounce and condemn this horrific action," he said, but admitted that the actions of segments of the Muslim community "projected a distorted and dark image of the faith of justice, love and brotherhood."

British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw criticized European media for reprinting the caricatures. While free speech should be respected, Straw said "there is not any obligation to insult or to be gratuitously inflammatory."

The U.S. State Department called the drawings "offensive to the beliefs of Muslims" and said the right to freedom of speech must be coupled with press responsibility.

"Inciting religious or ethnic hatred in this manner is not acceptable," said a State Department spokesman.

ENI reported: "Churches in Pakistan that faced attacks by enraged Muslims have decried the publication of cartoons containing caricatures of the prophet Muham-mad while European religious leaders have appealed to heads of faith communities to do all in their power to bring an end to the violence."

"We appeal to the Western and American Press that the act of disgracing the Holy Prophet of Islam be condemned, no one has any right to disgrace the prophets of other religions," said the National Council of Churches in Pakistan (NCCP).

The Islamic Council and the Christian Council of Norway joined the country's Lutheran church in denouncing the publication of the cartoons in Norway.

"Our sympathies go out to Muslims in Norway and the rest of the world who feel hurt by this unnecessary show of disrespect. When that which is sacred to one religion is attacked, all religions suffer," the joint Christian-Muslim statement said.

After arguing that the cartoons perpetuate the false perception that all Muslims are terrorists, one anonymous but articulate Muslim wrote online: "What Muslims are saying is that with every freedom comes a responsibility. Hopefully out of ignorance rather than malevolence, something deeply painful to the entire Muslim world was published in a Danish

A slow news day?

Some readers may be surprised to know that, since I began writing this column in 1990, I have almost never experienced writer's block. If anything, my difficulty has been to try to narrow the range of possible topics so that I do not end up speaking in generalities or reiterating things that could easily be found elsewhere. The invention and expansion of the internet has greatly complicated matters for me. Now it is possible to track stories from the remotest corners of the world — stories that the domestic media might not regard as sufficiently significant to report to Canadians. There is now, quite simply, more to choose from.

So what of the past month or so? Obviously, we have just had a federal election with a new party coming to power for the first time. Stephen Harper is now prime minister, and all eyes will be watching him to see how he performs in office. It hardly need be stated that, with only 36 percent of the vote and only a plurality of seats in the Commons, Harper's government scarcely has a clear mandate from the Canadian people. I doubt that I go very far out on a limb to suggest that Harper's tenure in office will not set any endurance records.

Then there was the Palestinian election that repudiated the previous Fatah government and handed a victory to Hamas. Trouble is, of course, that Hamas is a terrorist organization dedicated to the eradication of Israel. Its election will do nothing to advance the Palestinian cause, thereby proving that electoral majorities can be as foolish and shortsighted as their leaders.

But here are some stories that you probably didn't hear.

The foreign ministers of Slovenia and San Marino, a tiny state completely surrounded by Italian territory, recently met to solidify bilateral ties. To no one's surprise, they agreed that relations between the two countries are "trouble-free and good." Even if they were not, the possibility of armed conflict is exceedingly remote.

In the small Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan, wedged precariously between India and China, plans to adopt a democratic constitution and call the first elections were put on hold after royal astrologers persuaded His Majesty, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, that the stars are not favorably aligned for such a move. They assured him, however, that 2008 will be a better year.

Iceland may be overdue for a major subglacial volcanic eruption, scientists are warning. The last such eruption, of Mount Katla in 1918, produced a huge upward explosion of dirt and steam similar to a nuclear mushroom cloud. Hundreds of nearby livestock died,

newspaper. That in itself was an irresponsible use of the freedom of the press, which in no country anywhere is an unlimited freedom allowing journalists to vilify, libel or lie."

Bruce Clemenger of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada has joined his voice to those condemning the publication of the cartoons. Taking issue with the *Toronto Star* editorial that affirms the freedom of the press (though questioning the wisdom), he writes: "Our freedoms in Canada are not unlimited, and they require an apologetic. Simply asserting them is to revert to a form of dogmatism that is challenged when it surfaces in other assertions of certainty. In a society that claims to be respectful of diversity, freedom must include self-restraint and openness to understanding what is sacred to others."



Principalities & Powers

David T. Koyzis

mostly from the frequent lightning strikes produced by this phenomenon. Massive floods are another likely byproduct. However "green" it might initially seem, the presence of plentiful amounts of geothermal energy seems to come at a steep price, even for the physical environment.

Two weeks ago Serbia-Montenegro observed the third anniversary of the renaming of what's left of the former Yugoslavia. There were no celebrations. In fact, there is no certainty that the fragile union will hold together at all, with Montenegro planning a referendum on independence in the near future. My own educated guess? The union is doomed.

In the meantime, once again, Canada has a new government, bringing a breath of fresh air to the stale halls of Parliament Hill. Optimism reigns. Hope springs eternal. New and younger faces will grace the front benches in the Commons chamber. My prediction? There will be no slow news days for the foreseeable future.

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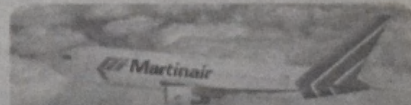
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Editorial

In the between time

Harry der Nederlanden

The Leopard, a film based on the novel by the same title by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa has long been recognized as a classic. It's a story with an equally classic theme – the passing of the old order. Set in 19th century Italy, it depicts the decline of the ancient Italian aristocracy as represented by Prince Salina and the rise of the commercial, money-grubbing class with its ambitions to re-engineer society to improve on the old order by taking into its hands the shaping of human destiny.

The film, made over 40 years ago, was shot with astonishing patience and loving attention to the textures and colors of daily life, dwelling on the landscape, homes, clothes and rituals of a time long vanished. The daily life is that of a prince with an ancient lineage living at the time of the republican revolution associated with the name of Garibaldi.

When the film opens, as the camera approaches the magnificent mansion of Prince Salina, we first hear and then see the entire extended family reciting their prayers aloud. In the middle of prayers someone bursts in with the news that Garibaldi's revolutionaries have landed, sending the entire family into a tizzy, as they prepare to flee before the republicans.

Prince Salina, played by Burt Lancaster, takes the long view of history: the more things change, the more they stay the same. He decides to cooperate with the new political order, sure that his ancient family and class will go on enjoying its privileged way of life with its magnificent villas, carriages, banquets and balls. The grand ball at the end of the film lasts about three-quarters of an hour – it is seen nostalgically through the eyes of an aristocrat who now knows that it won't be long before this grand way of life is gone.

Tancredi, the Prince's nephew whom he treats as his son, goes to join the republican army, which enables him to play the role of a hero of the new order. The Prince even finances his adventure. But when he returns, Tancredi continues to live the pampered life of the elite. Going off to engage in noble adventures and wars, we realize, has always been part of aristocratic mythology.

After the republicans have won, there are elections. In a scene of broad irony, we see the Prince arriving at the polling place in his carriage to cast his vote. The official in charge of the elections is heard telling the local folk to get in line because in the new order everyone is equal. But when Prince Salina walks in, everyone steps aside to allow him to go to the head of the line, and the official offers him

a chair and a cup of tea.

We begin to think, "Yes, the Prince was right: despite the revolution in government, the rich always remain on top."

One of the Prince's avocations, besides hunting and grand balls, is astronomy. His study is cluttered with telescopes and other astronomical instruments. His is the large and long view: he sees human history in terms of the orderly cycles of the planets, the enduring order of the heavens, and the regular alterations of the seasons. There is change, yes, but the essential order remains the same.

However, to adjust to the new order, the Prince arranges things so that his nephew Tancredi marries the mayor's daughter. The mayor is rich, one of the up and coming commercial class. He is a vulgar money-grubber, a typical bourgeoisie, depicted as unlikeable and contemptible. Despite his aversion toward the man, the ageing Prince sees that the mayor is the man of the future. He is buying up land, and he and his class have grand ambitions to create a new society in which life will be much better for the impoverished peasantry.

As he reaches out to the rising, newly wealthy class to save his own, the Prince begins to realize that this alliance is actually subverting everything he values. It will destroy the grace, the stature, the dignity of a way of life that is aligned with ancient, natural, divinely ordained patterns of life and society.

The film filled me with a deep sense of nostalgia and loss. But neither my family nor I have ever been part of a privileged class. In fact, according to an essay on income and class that I read some time ago, we'd never even made it to the level of the working class. So why on earth would I identify with the nostalgia of an aristocrat?

I was watching the movie with my youngest son Jonathan. He was home from Calvin for a few days and had found the film in the local library. He has become quite a film buff, and as I listened to him discussing the film, I realized that although I spent a few years in grad school studying literature, he has a much better understanding of the vocabulary of film than I.

As he talked, it dawned on me that when I was his age I could count all the films I'd seen on the fingers of both hands. We didn't have television, so I hadn't seen a lot of that either. He and I, I reflected, were separated by changes every bit as great as those portrayed in *The Leopard*. Perhaps greater.

After coming to Canada as a young kid just beginning school, I had been raised with two sisters in a four-room house (actually part of a house) about 800 square feet in size without running water and without paved roads. One of our main sources of entertainment was the radio. Between 8 and 9 o'clock several nights a week my sisters and I would listen to the Lone Ranger, the Cisco Kid, Wild Bill Hickock, the Scarlet Pimpernel and I was a Communist for the FBI. Besides that, there were comic books and books from the library. Movies weren't forbidden to me, but I had to choose what to spend my money on, and I seldom chose movies.

What a very different world my children have grown up from the one I grew up in, I thought. Yet, in a very messed up world with numerous temptations, I am often astonished at how level-headed they have all turned out. They are faced with far greater complexity and many more choices than I when I was their age.

When I look back on my teen-age days, I recall two incidents in which I now realize I was in all probability approached by a homosexual. But I didn't know what that was. I was shielded by my naivete and perhaps by the other fellow's fear as well. No, I'm not forgetting God's providence.

My children have grown up in a society steeped in a debased sexual knowledge, inundated with media, crowded

by the presence of others – others with very different views and attitudes than theirs. And they were probably raised in a more protected environment than most.

Looking at my son and wondering about what kind of future and what kind of society awaits him, I was struck by the thought that my own father must have looked at me in the same way one day long ago as he looked across the living room at me and observed that I was becoming a young man.

When he was a child, there were no cars, no radios, no television. There was soccer. He loved soccer, but he wasn't allowed to play on Sundays. On Saturday afternoons (there was school in the mornings) he was busy till late delivering groceries for his mother's little store. His youth differed even more from mine than mine from that of my children.

When he was in his mid-forties he packed up everything he could, sold the rest, and crossed the wide Atlantic with his family to start a new life in Canada. Last year, CC's anniversary year, I spent a lot of time reading through back issues. Immigrants like my father wrote about their hopes and dreams and sought to goad others to work together with them to create a future and a society better than the one their parents created – insofar as anybody can be said to create his own society. Looking back, I marvel at their daring, their optimism, their ambition, the hopes and dreams for themselves and their children that drove them. Yes, and above all their steadfast faith.

Most of that generation worked hard and prospered in this country. We, their children, were given advantages they never had, and we grew up surrounded by a level of wealth that most of our parents never dreamt of. And our children are accustomed to even more. When I comment on what a blessing it is to have an indoor toilet and a shower, my kids look at me as if to say, "Dad is having another one of his weird moments."

Overcome by the mood of the film, I tried to look back and on the present and peer into the future with the eyes of my father. "Is this the sort of world you would have wanted for your children and grandchildren?" I wondered. A society with very different values. Where families function very differently. Where marriages are abandoned with far too little thought. Where kids are confused about gender and experiment with drugs. Where we have far too much of everything, yet work long hours to get more. But where some are left far behind.

We exert huge efforts in an attempt to shape the future for our children. We make plans and organize. My father's generation, along with many CC readers, created many organizations and institutions all across this country – families, churches, schools, labor unions, credit unions, old age homes, political associations, and so on.

And yet the future turns out so very differently from what we expect. Traditions that our parents embraced as life-giving appear stultifying and oppressive two generations later. Henry Ford's bold vision of a motorized vehicle for every family to confer on the common man an unprecedented freedom has morphed by gradual degrees into a society hooked on oil and saddled with pollution. Who could have anticipated it?

Our visions and our constructions all too often turn out very differently from what we intended. But they are, thank God, not the meaning and end of our lives. When all our work is said and done, we can turn them over to God and we can ask for forgiveness for the great gulf between the vision of the Kingdom he has shared with us and what we have made of it.

Sometimes we anxiously ask, will there be faith on earth when the Lord returns? But then we may remind ourselves that the Lord does not depend on the perfection of our works but on the perfection of his own work in Jesus Christ.

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Letters/Valentine's Day

Buffalo Jump:

a movie about romance, relationships, rodeo and ranching

Maynard van der Galien

People often ask me how I come up with topics for the weekly and monthly columns I write. Valentine's Day is a very important day in February and so I thought about a romance column. Two years ago I did a survey quoting women's favorite Valentine's Day preference – be it flowers, chocolates, a day at the spa, or a romantic dinner with their loved one.

This year I've decided to review a favorite movie of mine. This movie has a little bit of everything in it. It has romance, relationships, culture differences, humor, farming, wonderful scenery, rodeo, and a downright ornery and interfering mother.

The movie is *Getting Married in Buffalo Jump*. It was filmed in Alberta in 1988. It's out on DVD and simply called *Buffalo Jump*.

It's the story of how a city girl, Sophie, an only child, played by Wendy Crewson, discovers herself and the true meaning of love by returning to the Alberta ranch where she was raised. Sophie is disillusioned with her life in Toronto as a pianist. She feels she doesn't have it to be a great pianist.

When Sophie's father dies of cancer,

he leaves the ranch to her in his will. Her mother is furious with her that she's going to stay on the ranch and make it a good ranch again just as her dad did. She hires a local farmhand, Alex, played by Paul Gross, to work for her on the ranch.

Alex grew up on a neighboring ranch with Ukrainian parents. She vaguely remembers Alex from her school days. The two make a great pair of ranch hands. Alex does all kinds of ranching chores. Sophie brings him cold water on hot afternoons and watches his shirtless body glistening in sweat.

Sophie's mother is furious when Sophie calls off a date with the local school principal and goes out on a date with Alex. "We're just going out for a coffee, not breeding," she tells her interfering mother.

In the restaurant Alex clumsily proposes a business proposition. Marriage!

He says, "You want to farm, and I want to farm and I propose..." and then he stumbles around and finally takes the toothpick out of his mouth and proposes marriage. Sophie is taken aback by this suggestion, as she has always thought that people get married for love, not for business purposes. She is so upset she gets in the old truck and goes

home, leaving Alex in town.

But Alex is persistent and Sophie realizes she can't run the farm by herself. She agrees to marry him. When Sophie's mom gets wind of that she tells Sophie that Alex has an illegitimate son with an Indian woman who lives in the neighborhood.

Sophie is devastated that Alex never told her. She breaks off the engagement and goes in search of the woman and her 11 year-old son wanting to know more about their relationship with Alex. Sophie discovers Alex did not walk out on the woman, but that she kicked him out. Alex gets to stay.

But the sly mom has enlisted the help of young real estate agent, Sophie's wild-driving city friend, Eleanor, played by Victoria Snow. Eleanor visits the farm and comes roaring down the lane in her sports car. For Sale signs are put up at the farm gate, but now Sophie is determined to marry the handsome Alex.

You'll chuckle at all the chores Alex does on the farm. He replaces the motor on the irrigation pump, but we don't get to see what crops they are irrigating. There are no crops shown, so why are they irrigating?

Behind the relationship,

there's also a story about the clash of cultures. Alex's parents won't give him a share of their ranch because of his past sins – fathering a child with an Indian girl. Alex's only chance at ranching is if he can woo the sophisticated Sophie and marry her. Sophie gets thrown off her horse. Alex comes to the rescue. They go skinny dipping in a deep farm pond. They go to a rodeo.

Alex's parents also give the couple a lot of frustration when they talk marriage. There's a lot of bargaining. Director Eric Till does a very good job of the touchy subjects. The acting is excellent.

Sophie and Alex beat the odds and do get married.

Maynard van der Galien owns and operates the Old Towne Hall Restaurant and Tea Room in downtown Renfrew, Ont. He has been writing columns for the past 17 years.



Will Harper act to end Canada's worst scandal?

The Conservative Party's election platform, *Stand Up for Canada*, is supposedly based on a sound fiscal plan that maintains a balanced budget, every year, with money left over. Prime Minister-designate Stephen Harper and his party even project a cumulative, five-year surplus of no less than \$23 billion!

Harper's campaign message claimed: "This platform presents a clear choice for Canadians...between old and new; entitlement and accountability; benefits for a few and leadership (government) for all." So, the new minority government promised, and urged voters, to Stand Up for Canada, by standing up for Accountability, Opportunity, Security, Families, and Our Communities.

The Conservative platform, presumably shaping the Harper government's political agenda, Throne Speech and first budget, rightly asserts: "The strength of Canada is the strength of our people and our communities, and government can play an important role in building strong communities." It further declares: "We need good housing in our cities and communities and a healthy, livable environment."

How true! Remember, adequate housing is a fundamental human right!

In addition to improving Canada's national infrastructure, which certainly is "a crucial investment in our economic productivity and quality of life," their platform advocates, "Building more affordable housing. All Canadians should have a fair chance to own or rent their own home."

The Conservatives are on record

promising, "A Conservative government will: Work with the provinces and municipalities to develop tax incentives for private-sector builders so that low-income city dwellers have improved access to affordable housing."

So, they promise, "Beginning in 2007-08, we will set aside \$200 million annually in the form of federal tax credits to encourage developers to build or refurbish affordable rental units in which at least 40 percent of the occupants earn less than 60 percent of the local median income."

This ideological, narrow approach, likely involving lengthy negotiations with the provinces and municipalities, raises key questions. These include: *Is this promise really enough? How many low-income families and homeless Canadians will immediately benefit and actually be enabled to get out of the cold? How soon will these vulnerable folks finally experience the "quality of life" promised by Harper and fellow Conservatives? Just when will the number of Canada's poor, hungry and homeless be sharply reduced and effectively eliminated?*

Obviously, as a caring nation we must unitedly deal with this disastrous situation. The government should, in close cooperation with non-government housing co-ops, do a great deal more for oppressed Canadians – by stewardly using its current surplus and projected \$23 billion cumulative five-year surplus.

For years, we have been told about the disgrace of child and family poverty (1.2

million Canadian children are living in poverty!), and about the scourge of hunger and homelessness. Time and again, we have been pointedly reminded that deep tax cuts do not build an enduring civil society; a society that is conscientiously committed to the common public good of all, inspired by inclusive public justice for all.

Indeed, the Harper-led minority government, with the active cooperation of the opposition parties, should courageously make the resolution of this national shame a moral must. This historic act should be a non-partisan, fiscal priority when Parliament convenes and debates the upcoming federal

budget this spring.

The parties' platforms: The Conservatives', "Stand Up for Canada," the Liberals' "Securing Canada's Success," the Bloc's "Heureusement, ici, c'est le Bloc," and, last but not least, the New Democrats' "Getting results for people," contain provocative proposals. When implemented fairly, they should help end Canada's social scandal, once and for all.

It's a question of political priorities and Parliamentary responsibility. It's an issue of integrity and fundamental values. *It's a matter of conscience!*

Gerald Vandezande

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Society

The search for rootedness in the guru culture

Peter C Glover

"It is not industry that makes men restless, but false impressions of things drive them mad."

Seneca, On The Shortness of Life.

It was a passing reference made in a minister's sermon that made me think about it. "Did you know," he asked, "that the increasingly popular pastime of genealogical research – searching out information about our family roots, our past – has become one of the leading leisure pursuits?" Imagine that. Surpassing even the nation's healthcare and fitness fads, cooking and diet obsessions and a myriad of other self-help gigs, finding about our own family roots has become big business.

The point he was making was that our generation, more than any other, is more mobile and uprooted than previous generations. We move home every few years, we spend hours getting to and from our place of work and we travel enormous distances to holiday destinations. It is this constant mobility that seems only to add to our general sense of rootlessness, loss of identity, community and, above all, belonging.

Consulting the gurus and experts

The desire to re-discover our sense of place in the world is reflected everywhere in our lifestyle choices too, and our constant search to find lifestyle gurus to tell us what to eat, what to do to be fit and healthy, what to wear, what to drink and even what to think. As the minister observed, "Gurus or experts are only too



willing to appear and tell us...for a price – and there are only too many willing to receive from them." It does not take more than a moment to confirm the truth in the remark. Nor the implicit irony that in the age of the postmodern, self-determining mind and 'free spirit', we should find ourselves scouring musty records in dusty old churches in the hope of finding our roots and our sense of belonging in the greater scheme of things.

We can see all of this readily enough every time we switch on today's TV. Self-help programs offering 'expert' advice are everywhere. Whole channels are dedicated to lifestyle choices. When we go to the newsstands we are jostled by a phalanx of different-yet-somehow-the-same shiny and colorful lifestyle magazines. We know well enough that what the latest popular guru dictates is 'good' one day, but this may well reverse the next. Still it doesn't deter us. We want to search every word of what they have to say, just the same.

But somewhere inside we know that we have heard it or read it all before. That does not stop us pursuing the dream and pouring our hard-earned cash into the pockets of the latest authority on this or that. "Do as I do," they seem to tell us "and you too can be rich like me." Again we may miss the irony. By selling us what has worked for them, they have indeed become rich. But originals have always been worth more than mere copies. And after buying all the books, CD's and taking all the courses to get "the inside track", we find that somehow it doesn't quite work for us.

The quick-fix generation

In the Wild West there was a name

for the purveyors of quick-fix elixirs. They were called snake-oil salesmen. One-stop cure-alls for all life's maladies. And today we live in the ultimate quick-fix generation. We flit around and search for the cure-all to heal the hole in our soul. Thus our highly self-esteeming mobile generation, with its grandiose sense of individualistic, anti-authoritarian freewheeling self-assertiveness, inadvertently reveals itself as really quite needy, quite dependent. As each generation's preferred pastimes reveal much about its needs and diversions, so the burgeoning genealogical research industry reveals the deep desire to discover who we really are – and our sense of family, community, connectedness and belonging.

So what are we learning from all our TV viewing and glossy magazine culture and its wealth of guru expertise?

Well, for one thing, we might observe honestly, if cynically, that they are getting richer while we are not. But, perhaps more significantly, that the glossy magazine culture that feeds our faddish minds is only feeding us with fragmented pieces of reality with which to piece together a coherent view of the world. Yet we take fragmentary truths, gleaned from sketchy news and glossy magazine articles quoting expert lifestyle gurus. And this helps us form our all-too transient, largely uninformed, yet often trenchant opinions about life, too.

Dispensing disinformation

Neil Postman, in his seminal work *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, on the deleterious effect of the TV culture on the modern mind, put it this way. "Everyone

is entitled to an opinion...but these opinions are of quite a different order from eighteenth- or nineteenth-century opinions. It is probably more accurate to call them emotions, which would account for the fact that they can change from week to week...television is altering the meaning of 'being informed' by creating a species of information that might properly be called disinformation."

"Disinformation does not mean false information. It means misleading information – misplaced, irrelevant, fragmented or superficial information – information that creates the illusion of knowing something but which in fact leads one away from knowing. I mean to say that when news is packaged as entertainment, that is the inevitable result."

It is not just television and the consumer magazine culture which feed the malaise. It is the whole nature of our modern soundbite world. That is why so many of us, sensing our lack of wholeness, are quite prepared to disengage for while and embark upon a search for our long abandoned family, community and roots. Even if it means rooting around long-abandoned church archives and on endless Internet searches.

It is not that Postman, or I, wish to knock the bottom plank out of the highly lucrative world of the quick-fix solution marketplace. Nor spoil the market produce of already well-heeled lifestyle gurus. Nor upset the media appellation that sets out their wares. Clearly they would only claim to meet a genuine felt-need. It is just that in this expert guru quick-fix culture we still, as Mick Jagger's generational anthem put it so well, "can't get no satisfaction".

Other than as a pastime or diversion, it seems that the guru culture cannot provide that rootedness which faith in the non-visual, non-material alone – such as in the Judeo-Christian tradition – can provide. While I go about my 'God-bothering' and thanking him for the sense of belonging I find in him, yet others are increasingly mooching around in dim-lit crypts (literally) beneath my feet. While others are on the trail of quite different gods.

Wherever each of us gets our sense of belonging in this most mobile of generations however, one thing appears increasingly certain. The snake-oil selling gurus that inhabit our TV screens and the pages of a mind-boggling number of national glossies – genealogically speaking or otherwise – may just have less spiritually 'rooted' answers than we hope or think. And our very pursuit of belonging rootedness is inherently revealing. It seems that, ultimately, whatever our opinions, far more of us betray ourselves to be people of faith, after all.

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Stewardship

Dragging the ocean for whales

Christopher DeVinck

At one point, all the starlings, sparrows, woodpeckers, turtle doves, and blue jays at the bird feeder disappear for the night as if on cue. Perhaps they are guided by a sudden, diminished sunset. Perhaps they have a built-in clock that tells them when it is time to fly inside the brush and sleep for the night. But the rabbit stays. It stands on its hind legs and fore legs, shakes its ears, and chews, rhythmically, at the birdseeds that have fallen from the small, plastic bird feeder that I fill every two or three days.

Sometimes at midnight, when I let the dog out, I look to my left, and there, often enough, is the rabbit happily chewing the seeds in the darkness. Of course I didn't realize that a rabbit's most active time in the wild is in the night.

Fairies, fireflies, rabbits and bears all inhabit the shadows of the night and the shadows of what I remember as a boy, when I could not sleep and imagined that spirits stepped out from behind the trees wearing firefly necklaces, or having tea with the rabbits and bears.

Children understand creative juxtapositions: goldfish and magic; kites and seashores; castles and sand. So what does a man think when he finds a rabbit in his yard in the middle of the night? I admit I sometimes pretend that it is a messenger, bringing me word that the Queen of Hearts demands my presence at her next croquet game, or that I am Jimmy Stewart imagining that there is a six foot rabbit wearing a tie and leaning against the oak tree.

Three days ago, Roe and I spent four hours on the ocean off Cape Ann, Massachusetts in search of whales. After one hour on the tour vessel, the guide announced, "Two o'clock, the spout of a humpbacked whale!" The captain of the ship spun his wheel, pushed the engines to full throttle so that we could speed, at a safe distance, alongside the rolling whale. And there it was: long, black, floating on the surface, and then it silently, magically slid underwater, and just before it disappeared, its tail rose up into the air, and then slowly slipped into the calm, blue water. Roe turned to me and said, with conviction and delight, "This is a privilege to see this."

"Whales never sleep," the guide said as we all began to look for more spouts of water. "And they have to think about breathing. We human beings breathe automatically, but a whale has to consciously make a decision and think about breathing; that is why it can never sleep."

In the middle of the night, when I am restlessly turning in my bed, when I cannot sleep, all the whales in the world are swimming, floating, blowing air out from the tops of their heads. "Whales do rest, however, for long periods of time. They float on the surface and breathe, sometimes at twenty minute intervals. In this relaxed state they do accumulate enough rest. This is called logging because they look like huge logs just floating on the surface of the water."

We saw two humpbacked whales logging. We saw a fin whale, the second largest whale in the world, swim within feet of our boat, and then disappear with its tail extended in the air before plunging into the water. "A number of years ago," the guide continued, "an old man came to us with a shoe box. Inside the box were hundreds of photographs of whales. The man said that when he was young, in the 1930's, he loved sailing out on the ocean and taking pictures of the whales diving, floating, breaching, swimming. He wanted to know if the pictures would be of any interest to us."

In the distance, a large spray of water broke the surface. "We said to the old man, 'Yes! We would love to have the pictures.' And because of those photographs, we have been able to identify many whales still living today by the shape and color of their tails. Imagine a young man taking pictures of these very whales seventy-five years ago."

Rabbits roam at night. Whales loll on the surface of the water. Old men keep shoe boxes of photographs from the days when they were young and anxious to seek out beauty with their little cameras.

Mark Twain wrote in his famous book, *Life on the Mississippi*, about his way of daydreaming: "When I'm playful, I use meridians of longitude and parallels of latitude for a seine, and drag the Atlantic Ocean for whales. I scratch my head with lightning and purr myself to sleep with the thunder."

Let us all be playful, and purr ourselves to sleep as we drag the ocean for whales, or transform ourselves into the mad March hare, and stir the fields at midnight as we continue to make the conscious decision to breath.

Talents 1: Identification

We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.... Romans 12:6a

The Spirit's gifts are here to stay in rich variety-fitting responses to timely needs. We thankfully see each other as gifted members of the fellowship which delights in the creative Spirit's work. He gives more than enough to each believer for God's praise and our neighbor's welfare.

Our World Belongs to God – 33.

God created mankind in his own image. It was the template he used when he shaped us. Yet, we are not all the same. God loves variety. Neither have we been endowed with the same gifts: skills, abilities, and aptitudes. We each have our own subset that reflects aspects of God's image.

Do you know what your special gifts are? It's important that you discover what they are. These gifts can be both practical and spiritual. How do you find out? Here are some practical suggestions to get you on the 'road of discovery':

Ask a close friend or colleague – someone who knows you. If you are a student and have a teacher that you personally can get along with – ask him or her. Ask them to give you some feedback on your gift set.

Take some of the on-line tests that look at vocation, aptitude, skills, and spiritual gifts. Any of these key words in a 'search engine' generates a lot of results. Many secondary school guidance programs use these types of test to help students direct their career and post-secondary education plans. Henrietta Hielema, a teacher at Woodland Christian High School, helps her students by guiding them through various 'gift survey' tests – Christian and secular, many of them web based. There are several she recommends. One such site is this one: www.communityfellowship.org/resources/tools/spiritualgiftinventory.asp for spiritual gifts. These tests, with her guidance, helps her students in their self-discovery and leads them to make better choices for their career paths.

I was surprised how many resources are available, many are initially free

Reflections on Stewardship

Rick De Graaf

and but make a charge if you want more detail. These little tests (like the one I tried at www.livecareer.com) usually have sets of statements that require you to choose which best reflects you. I tried a few and found them to be helpful in describing my 'gift set'.

For high school students consider the six session series from Faith Alive: "Youth – Discover Your Gifts".

For adults consider the seven session series from Faith Alive: "Discover Your Gifts" – 21 gifts are mentioned in the scriptures and the book is helpful in distinguishing the difference between "working" and "waiting" gifts.

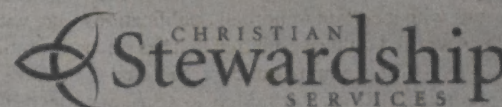
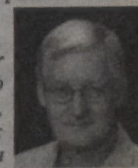
Finding out about your gifts is important for everyone, but especially for young people. Discovering your gifts helps identify and confirm areas of strength. It leads to a deliberate program of developing these gifts (more on that next issue) – to honor God and to provide service with contentment using the gifts that God has given you.

Stewardly Tip: A personal review. Maybe it's just me, but I've found that my 'working' spiritual gift set has changed over time as I take on new challenges and opportunities. I believe it is a worthwhile exercise to do a self-assessment annually but at least once every 5-7 years. Call it a personal retreat. Look back, study Romans 12 or 1 Cor. 12 or material suggested above, reflect on God's faithfulness and pray for his guidance as you consider and prepare for the future. He is the one who 'opens' and 'shuts' doors of opportunity – we just have to be willing to listen and take action.

Readers: Share your 'Stewardly Tips' so that we all can make better use of the resources God has entrusted to us. Submit your suggestion and your contact information so that we can acknowledge your contribution or ask for more details.

Next issue: Talents 2: Development

Rick DeGraaf works for Christian Stewardship Services in Markham, Ontario Rick's email: rickd@cssservices.ca



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Liturgy

Creation liturgy

European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN) made this liturgical material on themes related to God's creation available to the churches for use in the Fall of 2005, but many parts are no less appropriate in Spring. This is only a selection. More prayers and texts of earlier years are available and can be obtained from the office of the Conference of European Churches in Geneva.

I. Call to Worship

Loving creator

Loving Creator,
you care for the land by sending rain;
you make it fertile and fruitful.
All your creation sings for joy.

When we take care of the land,
sowing the seed and reaping the harvest,
All your creation sings for joy.

When we keep streams and rivers clean,
when we respect the purity of lakes and seas,
All your creation sings for joy.

When we recognise that we are one family,
brothers and sisters together,
with responsibility for the land and the waters,
All your creation sings for joy
for you bless us abundantly all our days.

(Per Harling, from *Gloria Deo*, Prayers & Hymns for 12th Assembly of CEC, 2003)

Blessed are you, O Lord our God

Blessed are you, O Lord our God,
life and light of the universe,
the one in whom the whole of creation
is nurtured and held.

Because of your tender mercy
the rising dawn comes to us each new day,
to shine on those living in darkness
and in the shadow of death.

May you guide our feet into the paths of peace,
and lead us deeper into your life and praise.

(from *Encircling Prayer*, Students and Staff of the Luther King House,
Partnership for Theological Education, Manchester, 2000)

From Psalm 104

Bless the Lord, O my soul.
O Lord, my God, you are very great.
You are clothed with honour and majesty,
wrapped in light as with a garment.
(sing) Halleluja

You stretch out the heavens like a tent,
you set the beams of your chambers on the waters,
you set the earth on its foundations,
so that it shall never be shaken.

(sing) Halleluja

You make springs gush forth in the valleys;
they flow between the hills,
giving drink to every wild animal.
(sing) Halleluja

You cause the grass to grow for the cattle,
and plants for people to use,
to bring forth food from the earth,
and wine to gladden the human heart.
(sing) Halleluja

May the glory of the Lord endure forever,
May the Lord rejoice in his works.

(from *Words and Songs of Reconciliation*, 2nd European
Ecumenical Assembly, Graz 1997)

May the Lover of Creation...

May the Lover of Creation,
who gives birth to all things,
the Beloved, who meets us in Jesus,
and the Spirit who joins us in love,
Three-in-Communion, One God,
make us a community of hope and wholeness,
loving the last and the least,
making peace, resisting evil,
and caring for the good earth,
till all things are fulfilled in the great dance of God;
and may God be praised, now and for ever. Amen.

(copyright © Brian Wren, from *What Does the Lord Require*, compiled
by Francis Brien, Canterbury Press, 2000. Used by permission)

Our Creator calls us

Our Creator calls us,
our Maker gathers us.

Let us come into God's presence with thanksgiving.

In wisdom God gave birth to all things,
loving and cherishing the earth.

*Let us love God's earth
and rejoice in its abundant life.*

In Christ, God loves us to the uttermost.

*Let us become what we are, the body of Christ,
walking together in justice and peace.*

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by Francis Brien, Canterbury Press, 2000. Used with Permission.)

II. Praise

From Psalm 36

With you is the fountain of life;
in your light we see light.

With you is the fountain of life.

Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens;
your faithfulness to the clouds.

With you is the fountain of life.

Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains,
your judgements are like the great deep;
you save humans and animals alike, O Lord.

With you is the fountain of life.

How precious is your steadfast love, O God!
All people take refuge in the shadow of your wings.
With you is the fountain of life.

They feast on the abundance of your house;
and you give them to drink from the river of your delights.
With you is the fountain of life.

(from *Gloria Deo*, Prayer & Hymns for the 12th Assembly of CEC, 2003)

God of power, God of people

God of power, God of people,
you are the life of all living things,

the energy that fills the earth,
the vitality that brings to birth,

the impetus toward making whole whatever is bruised
or broken.

In you we grow to know the truth that sets all creation free.

You are the song that the whole earth sings,
the promise liberation brings, now and forever.

(from *Words and Songs of Reconciliation and Praise*, Graz, 1997)

Great are you, O Lord

Great are you, O Lord,
and wondrous are your works,
and no word will suffice to sing your wonders.
For you by your will
have out of nothingness brought all things into being
and by your power sustain all creation,
and by your providence direct the world.
You from the four elements have formed creation
and have crowned the cycle of the year with the four seasons.

All the spiritual powers tremble before you;
the sun praises you; the moon glorifies you;
the stars in their courses meet with you;
the light hearkens unto you;
the depths shudder at your presence;
the springs of water serve you.
You have stretched out the heavens as a curtain;
you have founded the earth upon the waters;
you have bounded the sea with sand;
you have poured forth the air for breathing;
the angelic powers minister unto you...

(excerpt from the Orthodox Great Blessing of Water)

Bless the whole creation

Verse:

*If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,
Lord who could stand?*

For with you there is forgiveness. (Psalm 129,3)

O Christ,
who brought all things into existence from nothing,
and with ineffable wisdom
gave to each one to accomplish unerringly the goal
which you laid down in the beginning,
O Saviour, Lover of humankind,
as you are powerful,
bless the whole creation which you fashioned.

Verse:

*For your name's sake I have waited for you, O Lord;
my soul has waited for your word,
my soul has hoped in the Lord.* (Psalm 129,5)

Give peace to all the nations, Lord,
and understanding in all things,
so that we may lead our life in tranquility
and always keep the laws
which you laid down for all creation
for the unalterable maintenance
and government of the universe.

Verse:

*From the watch of dawn until the night,
from the watch of dawn,
let Israel hope in the Lord.* (Psalm 129,6)

Lover of humankind,
keep unharmed the environment that clothes the earth,
through which, by your will,
we who inhabit the earth live and move and have our being,
that we, your unworthy suppliants,
may be delivered from destruction and ruin.

Verse:

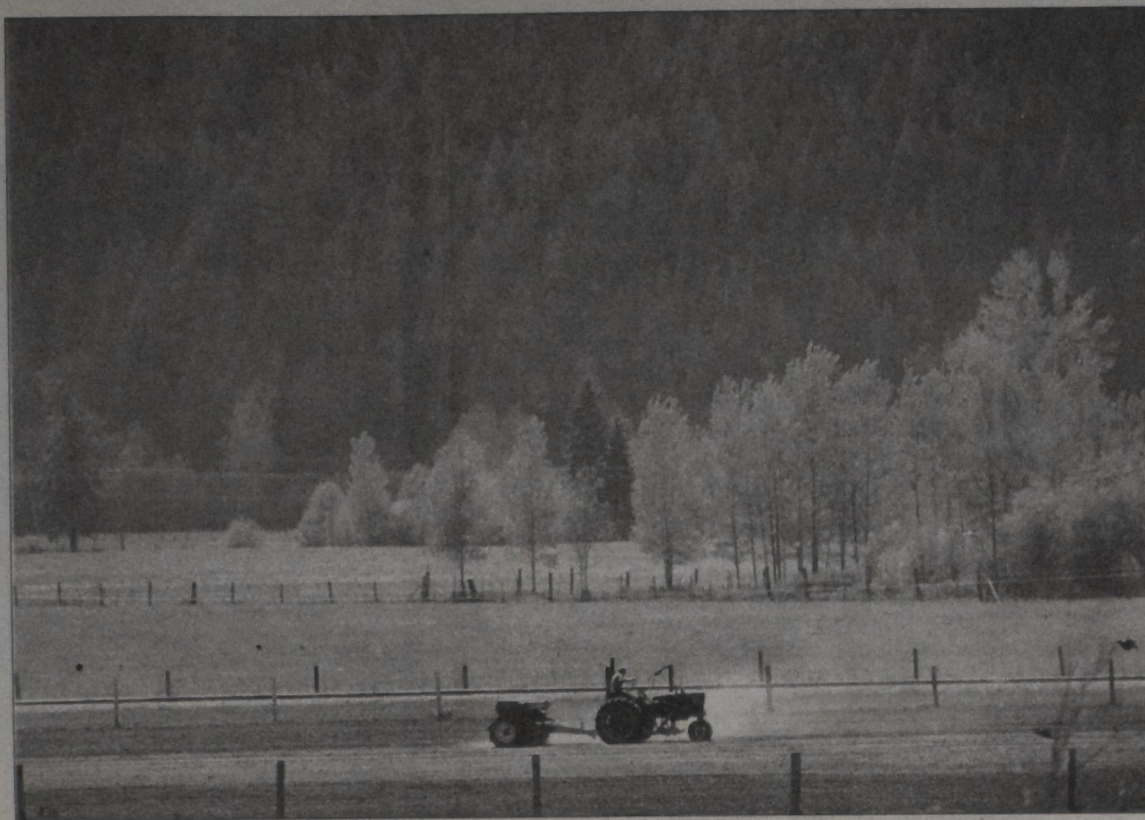
*For with the Lord there is mercy,
and with him abundant redemption,
and he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.* (Psalm 129,7)

Fence round the whole creation, Christ Saviour,
with the mighty strength of your love for humankind,
and deliver the earth we inhabit
from the corruption which threatens it;
for we, your servants, have set our hopes on you.

Verse:

*Praise the Lord all nations!
Extol him all peoples.* (Psalm 116)

Liturgy



Put an end, O Saviour,
to the evil designs which are being devised against us
by senseless intent,
and turn aside from the earth every destructive action
of the works of human hands
which contrive corruption
leading to perdition.

Verse:

**For great is his mercy to us,
and the truth of the Lord endures for ever.** (Psalm 116)

O Lord, who wraps creation in clouds,
watch over the environment of the earth,
which you created from the beginning
for the preservation of mortals,
and give us the breath of the winds and the flow of waters.

(from an Orthodox Office of Supplication for the Environment and
for the Whole Creation.)

Laudamus

Trees and flowers and mountain springs
praise the grace of you, Creator,
in whose breathing birds can sing,
in whose love creation grows.
Scents of forests, dancing winds,
rain and sunshine, crystal snowflakes
bring their soundless joy to you,
God of life and truth.

You were born as a child of peace
and you walked the way of the passion.
Through us love may yet increase
as we walk the way of Christ.
Every little newborn child, men and women,
every heartbeat bring their joy of life to you, --
God of life and truth.

Hear the sound of the blowing wind,
whispering our longing prayers.
Holy Spirit, come and bring life and peace
for times to come.

Listen: People sing new songs,
love is breathing, truth is winning,
and we lay our hope in you,
God of life and truth.

(Per Harling)

Praise the Lord throughout all the ages

Praise the Lord, all works of the Lord.
Praise the Lord, you heavens, you angels of the Lord.
Praise the Lord, all waters above heaven.
Praise the Lord, all powers,
Praise the Lord, sun and moon, stars of heaven.
Praise the Lord, all rain and dew, all winds.
Praise the Lord, sing and exalt him
throughout all the ages.

Praise the Lord, fire and heat,
cold and summer heat,
dews and snows.
Praise the Lord, nights and days,
light and darkness.

Praise the Lord, ice and cold, frosts and snows.
Praise the Lord, lightning and clouds.
Praise the Lord, sing and exalt him
throughout all the ages.

Let the earth bless the Lord.
Praise the Lord, mountains and hills,
all things that grow on the earth.
Praise the Lord, you springs, seas and rivers.
Praise the Lord, you whales
and all creatures that move in the waters.
Praise the Lord, all birds of the air, all beasts and cattle.
Praise the Lord, sing and exalt him
throughout all the ages.

Praise the Lord, you sons and daughters of men.
Praise the Lord, O Israel.
Praise the Lord, you priests of the Lord.
Praise the Lord, you servants of the Lord.
Praise the Lord, spirits and souls of the righteous.
Praise the Lord, you who are holy and humble in heart.
Praise the Lord, Ananiah, Azariah and Mishael.
Praise the Lord, apostles, prophets and martyrs of the Lord.
We praise the Father, the Son
and the Holy Spirit.
Now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

**We praise, bless and worship the Lord,
singing and exalting him throughout the ages.**

(Orthodox Vesper hymn, Holy Saturday, from the Hymn of the Three
Youth in the Book of Daniel according to the Septuagint)

A prayer of commitment

God has given us the world to care for;
let us commit ourselves to caring for God's creation.
Amen. We respond to God's gift.

Let us use our control over the natural world
wisely and sensitively.
Amen. We dedicate our efforts to serving God's Kingdom.

Let us exercise our husbandry of animals and birds
without exploitation.
Amen. May no creature suffer cruelty at our hands.

Let us nurture green and growing things
for nourishment and beauty.
**Amen. May we use all advances in knowledge to enrich life
on earth.**

Let us do all we can to keep pure the soil,
the air and the water that give us life.
Amen. May we cherish the earth.

Let us resist the temptation to exploit and pollute
for profit and convenience.
Amen. We cannot serve God and money.

Let us love our neighbors and open our hearts
to the needs of the poor.
**Amen. Jesus said: 'There is more happiness in giving than
in receiving.'**

Let us pass on to our children and the generations yet to come
a world fit to be called home for the whole created order.
**Amen. May we learn to appreciate the wonder of God's world.
In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.**

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III. Blessing

On the land

May the land be blessed by God.
May the earthly fields be full of goodness,
giving sustenance to all that grows.
May the sun shine on the farm,
encouraging life, giving warmth.
May God our Creator bless the land.

May the waters be given by God.
May the rain come in due season,
irrigating the earth for new growth;
may the rivers and lakes be brimming,
home to bright shoals of fish.
May God our Life-giver bless us with rain.

May the animals receive God's blessing.
May the cows be healthy and strong,
giving wholesome milk each day.
May the sheep be numerous and fit,
each with a thick coat of wool.
May God our Shepherd bless our livestock with health.

May the farmers be blessed by God.
May they be given wisdom and skill
to farm the land, making it productive.
May they be given compassion and sensitivity
to look after the animals placed in their care.
May God our Parent bless those who farm the land.

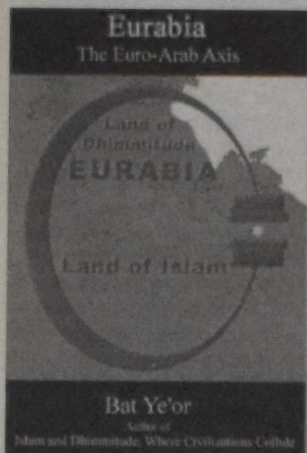
May the land be blessed by God.
May sun and rain and earth combine
To give us the fruitfulness of the fields;
may human beings and animals be partners
to give us joy in the harvest.
May God our Vine-dresser bless our land.

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Statements in boldface are congregational responses.

Review

Is Europe gradually surrendering its heritage to Islam?



Bat Ye'or

Eurabia: The Euro-Arab Axis, by Bat Ye'or. Fairleigh Dickinson, 2005. 384 pages, pb.\$28.05; hc.\$49.50. Reviewed by Harry Antonides

In fact, for the past 30 years France and Europe are living in a situation of passive self-defense against terrorism.... The dhimmitude of Europe began with the subversion of its culture and its values, with the destruction of its history and its replacement by an Islamic vision of that history, supported by the romantic myth of Andalusia [Spain under Islamic rule]. (Bat Ye'or, Paris, June 2004)

Bat Ye'or (daughter of the Nile) is a prolific scholar who has devoted her life to the study of the global impact of Islam. In doing so, she has taken direct aim at what has become established dogma in the Western halls of learning, eagerly bolstered by a powerful, worldwide Islamic dissemination network.

Against the grain

Her main theme is encapsulated in the term "dhimmitude," which refers to the system of slavish inferiority imposed by the armies of Islam on the conquered nations first in the Middle East, then reaching into Africa, Europe and Asia. It's a practice introduced by the Prophet Muhammad himself in the seventh century and prescribed in the Koran and the Hadith.

The author, who was born into a Jewish family in Egypt, experienced first-hand Islam-driven anti-Semitism when she and her family were expelled from their native country in the 1950s. The family found refuge in

England in 1957, where Bat Ye'or received her British citizenship. Now residing in Switzerland, she has issued a string of articles, interviews, and several books detailing the inner workings of Islamic domination throughout its history.

Her publications excel in bringing to light often neglected historical records that expose the myth of Islamic expansion by persuasion and peaceful means. The titles of her major publications suggest this overriding theme of her life's work: *The Dhimm: Jews and Christians Under Islam* (1985); *The Decline of Eastern Christianity Under Islam: From Jihad to Dhimmitude: 7th-20th Century* (1996); *Islam and Dhimmitude: Where Civilizations Collide* (2002).

Bat Ye'or is up against a powerful stream of opinion now prevailing in the Western world of Islamic and Arabic scholarship. Her views run counter to the Islam-is-a-religion-of-peace syndrome, advocated by such scholars as John Esposito, Juan Cole, current head of the influential Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA), and Karen Armstrong who serves as a propagandist for Islam. Alternatively, Islam-motivated violence is justified as merely the logical response to Western arrogance and imperial ambitions. (The late Edward Said's book *Orientalism* has been a major source for this two-fold interpretation of radical Islam.)

Backed by thorough research and a sometimes numbing accumulation of historical facts, the author of *Eurabia* insists that the sanitized

version of the history of Islam ignores reality. Her position can be summarized as follows:

- The Koran and the authoritative texts, that is, hadith and sira (Life of Muhammad), as interpreted by its radical teachers, instruct all followers to strive for the worldwide application of sharia law.
- The history of Islamic expansion is largely one of discrimination and violent repression of all non-Muslims, especially Christians and Jews.
- The last 35 years have seen the revival of an aggressive Islamism in the form of terrorism and a gradual encroachment facilitated by European appeasement.

Bat Ye'or details the story of the little-known, yet far-reaching and extensive discussions and agreements between officials of the European Community/European Union and the Arab countries under the name of the Euro-Arab Dialogue (EAD).

These initiatives led to the founding of the Parliamentary Association for Euro-Arab Cooperation (PAEAC) in 1974. This body, in which France has played a key role, was entrusted with managing all the details of Euro-Arab relations. The resulting glut of conferences, committees, subcommittees, and agencies have produced a rich harvest of consultations, agreements, seminars, symposia, reports and policies that are astonishing in their reach and complexity.

Crafty Negotiators

This book represents an admirable attempt to untangle the complicated web that has been spun since the founding of PAEAC more than three decades ago. It includes an extensive index and nine appendices containing excerpts of conference proceedings and other documents that tell a story of European concessions to clever Arab negotiators. As the author explains, these negotiators have proven themselves very adept at exploiting the following fears and aspirations:

- Arab countries are major suppliers of oil to European consumers who are fearful of any interruption of that flow.
- The influence of some 20 million Muslim immigrants, led by spiritual leaders who preach a message of hatred

towards Western culture and democracy.

- Fear of jihad-inspired terrorism within Europe, especially after the attacks in Madrid and London.
- A prevailing sense of guilt among Europeans for their alleged and real sins as colonial overlords in the Arab world.
- A determination to form a Euro-Mediterranean power bloc over against America.

Bat Ye'or does a masterful job of tracing these historical forces that have brought into being the new Europe, where the Muslim faith has invaded every aspect of life. It's a reality that people shy away from discussing openly, but it has created a great deal of uneasiness among the people of Europe. And there is reason for such uneasiness, for the new Europe is not the outcome of spontaneous and voluntary decisions within civil societies. On the contrary, it is a product of social engineering at the highest level of politics. The new Eurabia is foremost a top-down, statist structure concocted by a combination of self-confident Arab leaders and European politicians with a collectivistic and appeasement-prone mindset.

All of these features of the new Europe are dissected by the author of *Eurabia* in a way that sheds a great deal of light on the murky waters of this new enterprise. Many would be surprised by the extent to which European authorities have agreed to allow Islamic influence into the heartland of Europe. Writes Bat Ye'or:

Till this day the Euro-Arab Dialogue is totally unknown to Europeans, even though its occult machinery has engineered Europe's irreversible transformation through hidden channels. European taxpayers do not realize that they are funding the numerous foundations of the Dialogue, its complex bodies which are working under their own national parliament, the European parliament, the Commission, academia, press, media, and politicians - all weaving the web that conditions them to acclaim a system that has raised as virtues the denial of the Islamic threats and the renunciation of self-defense.

The various agreements and

policies within the scope of the Euro-Arab Dialogue have given priority to immigration from Muslim countries. They have furthermore prescribed Muslim-friendly cultural policies for the schools and universities of the EU, the diffusion and promotion of Islam and the Arabic language and culture, via the establishment of Arab cultural centres in European cities, and the promotion of Euro-Arab diplomacy in international forums, especially at the U.N.

Mind conditioning

What has received a great deal of attention in the interaction between the two parties is the development of policies independent of (read "opposed to") those of the U.S., support of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, including the legitimization of Arafat's corrupt and violent regime, and the delegitimizing of the state of Israel.

There is an emphasis on shaping public opinion through education and the media. For example, it has been agreed that Europeans dealing with Arab immigrants will undergo special sensitivity training; history textbooks are to be rewritten by joint teams of European and Arab historians; the teaching of Arabic language and Islamic culture in the European schools are to be taught by Arab teachers experienced in teaching Europeans.

The astounding reality of such surrender by European authorities hits home all the harder if you note that very little is said about the need and methods for immigrants to learn and adapt to the ways of their new homelands. All the impetus is one way only. No wonder Bat Ye'or describes these one-sided arrangements as an abject surrender and a kind of suicide committed by the European leadership.

One cannot help but wonder how it is possible that this lamentable state of affairs has come into being. There are of course many layers to this reality and all sorts of currents and counter currents are at work here. But I believe that the following all too-cryptic summary gets at an important truth.

Europe, the once strong heartland of Western democracy, and the inheritor of the Judeo-Christian worldview, is no match

Reflection

Once I saw with X-ray vision, but now —

Christopher DeVinck

"Superman! I think Lois Lane is locked in that steel vault!"

"Stand back, Jimmy. I'll take a look!"

And the mighty man with X-ray vision places his hands on his waist, concentrates with his drilling eyes and there, sure enough, deep inside the vault, he sees poor Lois tied to a chair struggling. And, of course, Superman breaks through the vault as if it was Jell-O and rescues the grateful Lois Lane.

I once had X-ray vision. I could see through the walls and watch my grandmother read the paper in the kitchen. If I held my hands across my eyes, I could see my brother's goofy face on the other side.

Actually, when I was a boy, my vision was my only true power over the world. All my brothers and sisters and both my parents wore glasses, but each time I had to read the eye chart at the doctor's office, I was always able to read the small E no matter where it stood on the white chart hanging from the wall. I pretended that I had super vision.

Last spring I was sitting at the garden furniture in the full sun reading the newspaper. It was the time of the year when the air is warm and suddenly cool again. I felt a bit uncomfortable, so I collected the paper, stepped inside the house, sat on the living room couch, unfurled my paper and began to read once again. I couldn't make out some of the words, so I clicked on a light.

The words were still blurry. I complained aloud that the lamp was useless, that the paper company was using cheaper and cheaper ink.

The next day, and for the next month, I enjoyed my books and papers out on the

deck in the full sun. Whenever it rained, or the clouds were up, I'd try and sit in the house and read, but found, again, that the silly lamps were useless.

I did not know that I needed glasses. Superman never needs glasses, unless, of course, only as part of his disguise.

When the eye doctor first asked me to read the chart filled with the letter E in all sorts of positions and sizes, I almost placed my hands on my waist and nearly said, "No problem, Lois," but the more I looked, and the more I squinted, the more I realized either there was some kryptonite hidden in the room, or I was growing older.

A few weeks later I stood at a podium at a college in Illinois about to begin my presentation. When I reached into my jacket for my new glasses, they weren't there. They were abandoned, perhaps purposely, on the kitchen table back in New Jersey.

When I jokingly said to the audience that I forgot my reading glasses, a woman in the front row pulled a black pair from her purse, stepped up to the stage and extended her hand. But Superman doesn't need glasses, Lois.

I made my presentation, read successfully selections from my books, thanked the audience, and when I tried to return the glasses to the woman in the front row, she waved me on saying, "Oh, they are just cheap pharmacy glasses. Keep them."

I use my cheap pharmacy glasses here at my desk where I write because, with their black rims, I look like Clark Kent. When I am in public, I wear my sleek, rimless, crystal-powered, deluxe X-ray spectacles and soar about the crowds faster than a speeding bullet, walk with

more power than a locomotive, and leap tall buildings in a single bound.

My brother was blind. He never saw a squirrel, sailboats, a Yankee game, a painting by Memling, or a mountain. My brother never saw a ballet, or a cactus, or an ice-cream cone, or the Grand Canyon or crayons.

No one knows for sure when glasses were invented. Around 1287 Italian paintings, for the first time, depicted people holding or wearing spectacles, so it is assumed that they were first created in Italy. In those earlier days only noblemen or scholars wore glasses.

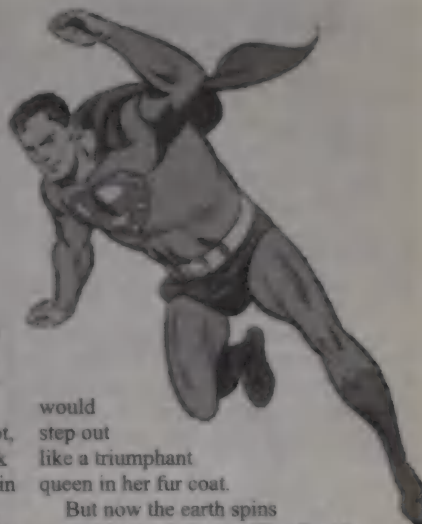
I am no nobleman, or scholar. I am not, even in the end, Superman. I'd often pick daffodils for my brother and place them in a vase beside his bed. Perhaps I thought being in the proximity of beauty might, by some sort of osmosis, bring him pleasure. What we do not see can reveal hidden secrets. There are daffodils beside you.

Hawks can see a mouse from as high as one mile. The deeper a fish lives in the ocean, the bigger its eyes are. The natural world trains itself to enhance its vision for survival.

The first time I saw an elephant at the zoo, I staggered backwards. How could something so large, and so wrinkled, and so powerful extend its long trunk and pick out a peanut from my sister's hand? You would almost have to see an elephant in order to believe of its existence.

"Superman! The cat's locked in the basement."

I'd stand before the door, stare hard, and say to my little sister, "Tiger Lilly is all right. Open the door." And my sister would open the door, and Tiger Lilly



would step out like a triumphant queen in her fur coat.

But now the earth spins around in the darkness. We all seek power, which is nothing more than a unique commodity that others do not possess: authority, wealth, fame, strength. Being a middle child, being a man beyond middle age, living in the 21st Century places a unique burden on the sense of self.

I close my eyes and imagine spring. I close my eyes and remember swimming at the seashore when I was six. Close your eyes, and what do you see?

Helen Keller wrote "The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt within the heart."

Elephants. Superman. My brother. Daffodils. The Grand Canyon. Hawks. All, all is nothing without the divine soul of man closing his eyes, pointing and saying with clarity, "I see. I see. Let no one doubt that I see."

Europe and Islam ...continued from p. 10

for the aggressive, even fanatic branch of modern Islam beholden to a theocratic worldview that is fundamentally at odds with the historic Western tradition of freedom and democracy.

Everything in this book is important, but I believe that the key to understanding this very complex story lies in what Bat Ye'or calls the conditioning of the minds. This is the reason that the Arabs have pushed very hard for demanding not only a place of honor and respect for Islam but one of superiority within European education and the media.

Superiority Complex

At the Hamburg Symposium of the EAD held in April 1983, the German minister of foreign affairs Hans-Dietrich Genscher

spoke glowingly of Europe's debt to Islamic civilization, a recurring theme at all such gatherings. The notion of moral superiority played a major role in the Arab-Israeli conflict, ultimately leading to uncritical European support of the Palestinian cause. The same influence is at work in the prevailing anti-Americanism in the European media and academy that has had a powerful effect on public opinion.

Most importantly, the Arab side of the EAD has pushed hard at convincing its European partners that the Islamic influence in the history of Europe is superior to that of the Judeo-Christian tradition. This is how one of the sheiks in his address at the al-Haram mosque in Mecca in February 2002 explained this to his audience: "The noblest

civilization ever known to mankind is our Islamic civilization. Today, Western civilization is nothing more than the product of its encounter with our Islamic civilization in Andalusia [Spain under Islamic rule] and other places."

As far-fetched as such a statement is, it represents the attitude that is very much in evidence in the Euro-Arab network of alliances described in this book. And it goes a long way in explaining how a once self-confident and democratic centre of Western culture has entered a partnership that amounts to the betrayal of a sacred trust.

Those who want to get a

better understanding of the forces shaping our world will be well served by Bat Ye'or's diligent exploration of a subject many

refuse to touch.
Harry Antonides
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Arts and Worship

Calvin Symposium on Worship inspires Christians from around the world

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

It's not every day that I'm joined by a complete stranger in singing the refrain of a Bible song as I walk along. But that marvelous connection happened at the Calvin Symposium on Worship held at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan from Jan. 26-28. Rushing between workshops, I began to hum the tune of "For the Glories of God's Grace" by Marie J. Post. Then, without intending to, I sang out loud, "We are reconciled to God." An older African-American gentleman walking behind me heard me singing and joined in with me. We repeated the refrain, smiling broadly at each other; two strangers - male and female, from different ethnic groups, and varying in age - connected in Christ.

About 1500 people attended this year's Symposium, among them international guests from 14 different countries including Botswana, China, France, Ghana, Hong Kong, India, Japan, The Netherlands, South Africa, Singapore, Romania, Sri Lanka, Uganda, and the United Kingdom.

In the Symposium handbook, organizers John D. Witvliet (director of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship), Scott Hoezee (director of the Center for Excellence in Preaching), and Emily Brink (program chair of the Symposium) wrote: "We hope that the Symposium has some of the same flavor of joy that the Israelites experienced when they



came up to Jerusalem each year for their annual festivals. They came from different tribes, and eventually from different lands and tongues . . . God has drawn us together here also to offer our worship in ways that celebrate the diversity of the children of God in our churches and communities."

That flavor of joy did permeate the Symposium's plenary sessions, workshops, and six worship services based on the theme, "I am with you always."

Circle of friends dramatize Christ's victory

In one of the worship services held during the Calvin Symposium on Worship, students from the Christian Learning Center Circle of Friends Drama Team based at Zeeland (Michigan) Christian School, performed a drama portraying the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Consisting of persons with special needs as well as their classroom peers, the team chose a wordless drama because they wanted to show their love for Jesus, but some members of the group are unable to do so effectively with words.

In the drama several of the children crowded around a box, opened it up, and removed brown scarves, which were placed around their necks. A boy with Down Syndrome dressed in white (who played the role of Jesus) and two girls dressed in white robes (who played the role of angels) stood to the side. Another boy dressed in black signified Death. A large red shawl was placed around "Jesus'" neck. "Death" and the children in brown scarves grabbed "Jesus" and nailed him to an imaginary cross.

The boy with Down Syndrome portrayed our Lord's crucifixion - the agony, the pain, and the final slumping in death - with incredible emotion. Later,

he was lowered to the floor and covered with the brilliant red cloth. The "angels" showed the passing of time as they rotated around his body. Then they removed the red shawl. "Jesus" leaped up. His radiant face conveyed the glorious victory of the resurrection.

The "angels" stood in front of "Jesus," holding the red shawl between them. As "Jesus" watched, two by two, the children passed beneath the red shawl, which signified the blood of the Lamb. The resurrected "Jesus" removed their brown scarves and replaced them with vividly colored ones.

In response to their new life in Christ, the children scattered seeds from wheat sheaths over the stage floor, bringing to mind Jesus' words, "Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds" (John 12:24).

The Circle of Friends' drama was one of the Symposium's highlights for me. I saw the love of Christ revealed on the children's faces and through their actions. I'll not soon forget the look on the face of the boy with Down Syndrome when he leaped to life.

The worship services, held each morning and evening, developed the theme as it is first revealed in the Old Testament books of Exodus and Isaiah and later in the New Testament book of John. According to the Symposium 2006 Worship Book, the services were built on the same theme that was chosen for the international Assembly of the Reformed Ecumenical Council that met last summer in Utrecht, the Netherlands. Worship leaders from the Calvin Institute for Christian Worship helped to plan and lead the ten morning services held there.

Insights from two sermons I heard had a profound impact on me. I'm sure my fellow worshipers were struck by other truths as expounded on in the other four sermons, as God worked in each of our hearts in the places that we are now at on our faith journeys.

Rev. Thomas G. Long, Bandy Professor of Preaching at Candler School of Theology at Emory University, entitled his sermon, "Troubled?" Exploring Jesus words, "Do not let your heart be troubled," Rev. Long challenged worshipers with the reality that the church, too often caught up in its own agenda and insular thinking, is insufficiently troubled by the world's brokenness. Christians need to open their eyes to the pain and evil around them in order to have an impact on their communities, instead of pretending that every thing is all right, he stated.

However, this creates a dilemma for believers. If they do see the evil and interact with the brokenness, how can their hearts remain untroubled? After all, even Jesus was greatly distressed by what he saw in the world, and in the Garden of Gethsemane before his death "he began to be deeply distressed and troubled" (Mark 14:33).

Rev. Long maintained

that obedience to Jesus' command is possible only because on the cross he took all the world's troubles into himself. With this sure knowledge as their foundation, Christians can have an impact on a distorted world in need of redemption. (Look for a review of Rev. Long's book, *Testimony: Talking Ourselves into Being Christian*, in the next issue of *Christian Courier*.)

In another sermon, entitled "Mock Service or Real Living?" Rev. Michael J. Quicke, Koller Professor of Preaching and Communication at Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, showed how Jesus linked serving to following in a cross-shaped life. Quicke pointed out that it is easier for Christians to pick their own avenues of service than to follow the path that Jesus chooses for them. He lamented the fact that many Christians tarnish their service to Christ by their own selfish motives.

Jesus did not come to earth to follow us around as we decide where to go. Instead, he came so that we would follow him. Quicke mentioned a helpful spiritual exercise that he engages in. In a journal he has made two columns - one marked S and the other F. At the end of each day he reflects on his activities. He lists under the S column those things in which he tried to serve Jesus. In the F column he lists those things in which he served following in the path that Jesus led him. Though the distinction may not seem significant at first glance, it has huge ramifications for our life in Christ, for it is only in following Jesus that we can accomplish what he wants us to.

Plenary sessions provided Symposium participants with an opportunity to reflect more deeply on their faith in God. In one session Eugene Peterson, widely acclaimed for his paraphrase of the Bible, *The Message*, and his recently published book, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology*, explored what he called the defining event in Abraham's life - the binding of Isaac on the altar and the offering up of his life in obedience to God on Mount Moriah.

Peterson suggested that there is much in the story that we have difficulty understanding. After all, how could God command the



Arts and Worship



unavoidable reality of every Christian's life – on our faith journeys we will each face a personal Mount Moriah.

Listening to Peterson's speech and Medema's song, each declaring the same biblical truth reminded me once again of how God has uniquely gifted each Christian with the means to proclaim his glory, and how beautiful it is when gifts complement each other to extol God's virtues and define the Christian's faith life.

The use of other gifts in worship abounded at the Symposium. To name just a few, the Calvin College Gospel Choir shook the rafters when it sang "Blessed Assurance, Jesus is Mine." The Calvin College LOFT (Living Our Faith Together) worship team led participants in the stirring Ngala song, "Yesu azali awa! Jesus Christ is With Us." Pianist Rev. Jorge Lockward and organist Rev. Robert Glick helped us proclaim God's

praises. Many other instrumentalists did their part. Liturgists Emily Brink and Laura Carpenter, along with many other readers, added their spoken words to the proclamation of God's glory.

The Workshop Symposium offered far too many insights and experiences to share in a short article such as this. However, its goal to celebrate the diversity of God's children was encapsulated for me in the last workshop I attended before heading home, tired and overflowing with gratitude to God.

The workshop, named the Blessing of Global Song, and led by Rev. Jorge Lockward, director of global ministries for the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church, dealt with "the blessing of the cross-cultural sharing of musical expressions of prayer." When I entered the room, I noticed a mother cradling her newborn child. The baby lay quietly in her mother's arms as participants discussed and explored the topic at hand.

My attention was drawn to the baby once again as we sang the closing song, "For Everyone Born" by Shirley Erana Murray from New Zealand. The words of the first verse jumped out at me as I watched the infant: "For everyone born, a place at the table, for everyone born, clean water and bread, a shelter, a space, a safe place for growing, for everyone born a star overhead" (1998 Hope Publishing Co.). It struck me anew that from birth to old age, and from every place in the world, God is calling his children to worship – his children, who, as Rev. Quicke said in his sermon, find themselves "in the greatest story ever told."

murder of Abraham's beloved son, whom God himself had given to Abraham? The midpoint in the book of Genesis, this story is like a huge boulder blocking our understanding of God.

So, why is it there? Peterson said that the story is one in which we become acclimated to the word "faith." Faith has to marry the visible with the invisible; in faith we follow the living God who, we believe, knows what he is doing even if we don't understand it.

Peterson continued by saying that New Testament writers chose Abraham as a prototype of faith; he is "the dictionary in which we look up faith." But we don't get a definition. Rather, we get a story. His story shows a way of life in which God is immediate, and in which a person gradually, over a lifetime, learns to live with God.

But, he pointed out, the details of Abraham's encounter with God on Mount Moriah are sparse. We aren't given much detail. Otherwise, we might want to be just like Abraham. We are all originals when we live by faith. Just as in Abraham's life, our faith needs testing. As with Abraham's Moriah test, our test will be embedded in the life of sacrifice, not as an abstraction, but in our real, everyday lives.

In response to Peterson's thought-provoking speech, Ken Medema – song writer, pianist, and singer, whose choral music, song collections, and recordings can be found at Briar Patch Music – sang an extemporaneous, personalized summary of what we had just heard. Medema's profound insights and heart-wrenching voice captured the

Bidding farewell to Mom, Grandma

Even a long life seems brief through the eyes of grief

Lisa M. Petsche

The start of another calendar year is traditionally a time for new beginnings. In our family, though, this time it turned out to mark an ending.

My husband's mother, who had appeared fine on New Year's Eve and was to join us for a special dinner the next evening, suddenly fell ill on New Year's morning. By mid-afternoon she was in a hospital intensive care unit. A long, sleepless night followed, our emotions alternating between hope and despair.

Unbelievably, Jean died, shortly before dawn, the victim of an insidious infection that had spread throughout her body.

The hardest part of all, after the initial wave of grief and shock, was breaking the news to our children. My husband and I knew that, like us, they'd be devastated.

For the next few days, Sean, also known as "Grandma's guy" – Jean's youngest grandchild and only grandson – cried inconsolably and complained of a headache and stomach pains. Our two daughters, meanwhile, became quiet and withdrawn.

My husband and I, along with his sister and her spouse, have derived some comfort from knowing Jean touched the lives of many people – evidenced by the funeral home turnout and the volume of cards and letters we've received.

If you could say only one thing about Jean, it would have to be that family always came first with her.

The fifth of eight children, she grew up during the Great Depression. Tough times were compounded by the premature death of Jean's father and her eldest brother's imprisonment in a P.O.W. camp. She learned at an early age the importance of sticking together as a family and supporting one another.

As a young, married woman, she returned every Sunday evening to the farm where she grew up, to reconnect with her mother and siblings while her children spent quality time with their cousins.

The lakefront summer cottage purchased early in her marriage – Jean's little corner of heaven in the Muskokas – was another gathering spot for family members over the years. (Amazingly, almost everyone at her funeral had spent time there.) She had an open door policy at home, too, welcoming anyone who stopped by with a seat at the kitchen table and a cup of coffee or a cold drink.

As Jean's world gradually shrunk due to her husband's death, the sale of the cottage and, most recently, vision loss, relationships took on even more significance.

She delighted in simple pleasures such as a visit from one of her siblings; a phone call from an overseas relative; her favorite take-out coffee delivered by one of us on our way home; going out for coffee or lunch with her school chums; and spending time with her grandchildren (five in all), making lunch and snacks for them and playing cards or one of the numerous board games she had on hand. These were the things that made her days worthwhile as she endeavored to maintain her independence and remain in her home.

Her passing has left a hole in many lives. In ours, it's a gaping one.

Grandma lived a mere block away from us; we were over at her place all the time. Every special occasion was celebrated there, too. We're reminded every day as we drive by her house.

Last fall I wrote a column prompted by the death of Jean's older sister, reflecting on Sunday evenings spent with her and other relatives out at the farm. It concluded: "Aunt Marjorie's recent death marks the end of an era. The gathering spot is gone. Sundays will never be the same."

Now another gathering spot is gone. No day will ever be the same. It's an ending we weren't ready for.

But it's a new beginning for Jean, who has left behind worldly cares and is reunited with her husband, who predeceased her 15 years ago.

It's also a new, albeit reluctant, beginning for our family. We must learn to live without Mom's and Grandma's tangible presence and find ways to keep her alive in our minds and hearts instead.

We won't forget.

Peace, Jean. 'Till we meet again...

Lisa M. Petsche is a mother of three and a freelance journalist specializing in family life.



Ecclesiastes

All trust in God is blind

For who knows what is good for a man in life, during the few and meaningless days he passes through like a shadow? Who can tell him what will happen under the sun after he is gone?

Ecclesiastes 6:12

A. A. van Ruler

In the preceding verses, the Preacher has observed that man cannot take God to court, for God is much stronger than he, and that therefore all complaints and charges brought against God's royal majesty are meaningless and futile (vs 11).

In this verse he provides a basis for these observations: he says that a person is not even able to judge what is truly good for him. The Preacher proceeds from the supposition that only those bold enough to judge God's actions can do so. For the standard by which one judges God's actions can only be one's own judgment about what is good for him. Usually the two don't jibe. What we want and what we get are two very different things. So we rebel, murmur, complain and accuse.

The Preacher poses an extremely critical question here: he asks whether our presuppositions about our judgments concerning God's actions are right. Do we really know what is good for us?

We naturally do try to envision what is good for us. There's nothing wrong with that. We are even permitted to make such desires known to God. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God," writes Paul (Phil 4:6). So this does not cancel us out. Prayer engrafts us in God's government of the world.

But this is no warrant for man to puff himself up and put on airs. Our notions about what may be good for us are simply wishes. When we pray we may submit them to God as such, but we must not imagine that we have the first and last word on what is actually good for us. God has some ideas about that too, and these are often very different and much higher than our own ideas.

In this way, the ability of judging what is good is taken out of our hands. Not mainly because the world is shrouded in darkness and we are small and fallible, but first of all because God is so much

greater, higher and deeper than we are. He alone truly knows what is good. This is true in terms of what is good for us on the natural as well as on the moral level. What is good for us on the natural level God makes known to us in the course of our lives, and what is good for us morally he makes known in his commandments.

So we should not argue with God too much. We do, however, argue with God about what happens to us as well as about his commandments. For we reflect on both. We even judge what God does and what he says. We are driven by a strong desire to gain insight into their goodness. And this gives rise to a thousand ruminations and thousands of words.

Nevertheless, there is an end and a limit to them all. We finally bump into height and goodness of God's words and deeds as if into a wall. Then it is better to be still. At that point the words that we still insist on speaking quickly become pretentious and futile. They only increase the meaninglessness of our existence (6:11).

The Preacher adds another accent, but it is hard to see how it relates to his train of thought. He strongly emphasizes the brevity of human life: "Who knows what is good for a man in life, during the few and meaningless days he passes through like a shadow?" We only discover that in retrospect, at the end of our lives. But by that time our lives have passed away like a sigh.

Why does the Preacher put so much emphasis on life's brevity in this context? Perhaps he means to suggest that knowing what is good is therefore not of such fundamental importance. It is so short anyhow. But that would be a dark and bitter observation. It would even undermine the seriousness and significance of human life.

So the interpretation is probably to be found elsewhere. For example, the Preacher might be saying: Isn't it strange that although life is so short we still cannot get an overview of it and get a grasp on it



By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. Hebrews 11:8

so that we can judge what is good for us. If this is what he means, the verse is an expression of surprise.

This hints at still another consideration. The brevity of life does not only mean that it is short but also that it passes swiftly. It slips by before we know it. We are unable to grasp a hold of it. There simply isn't enough time to let its meaning penetrate into us. So we don't know what is good.

This is, at any rate, something each and every one of us feels deeply at some time in our lives. Life slips through our fingers like the grains of sand that sift through the fingers of children playing in the sand on a summer beach. It is past before we realize what it was all about.

The Preacher also emphasizes one other thing about the brevity of life. It is not just the present that escapes us; it is also the future. We know nothing whatsoever about the future, much less than about the present. "Who can tell him what will happen under the sun after he is gone?"

We'd love to know that, wouldn't we? We are all possessed of a gargantuan curiosity, a curiosity not just about the secrets of our neighbors, but also about the

secrets of the future. We try to penetrate the future with all manner of means of foretelling the future or making predictions.

There is no doubt that human beings possess occult powers to glimpse something of the future. But the Bible has stern warnings against it, saying that we must not avail ourselves of those powers. We stand in the present, where we have the destiny that has been given us and the fullness of God's revelation, including his commandments. To this we must limit ourselves.

The future therefore remains a closed book to us, deliberately and in principle. But this also implies that we do not have the ability to judge what is good for mankind in this life.

The present is incomplete without the future; the individual is incomplete without the rest of the human race; and a lifetime is incomplete apart from world history. The one is part of the other. To grasp the meaning of a single human life, it is necessary to be able to oversee the entire world history of which he is part. Only then would we be able to judge what was good for him in his life. What an individual experiences

and does has repercussions for his ancestors and for the future of the entire human race.

How on earth can man grasp all this in its entirety? Can we, like Atlas, bear the whole world on our shoulders? Do we have any other choice than to radically leave this up to God? Must we not as human beings entrust the world to God? And doesn't this include entrusting ourselves and our lives to God as well, since we are part of this world?

The Preacher does not come to this conclusion in so many words. He merely observes negatively that a person cannot know the future and the good and that therefore he cannot judge the high deeds of God. He brings forward the startling side of it — the blind side contained in this trust. He does not add the positive side: that we can with all assurance entrust all these things to God.

But we may draw that conclusion, for the whole Bible is a call for such trust. So I assume that the Preacher wants to say the same thing: we must and we can trust God.

World

Haitian cane-cutters struggle

Life in the sugar fields of the Dominican Republic



Danna Harman

ST. JOSE DE LOS LLANOS, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC – Large-scale sugar production began in the Dominican Republic in the 1870s. In many ways, little about the process has changed since then. The sugar cane still grows tall, wild, and sweet, and Haitian laborers – poor, desperate, and hungry – still work day in, day out, to cut it.

The Haitian workers, then as now, typically live in bateyes – company towns located within the sugar plantations. Some have electricity. Most lack running water. There are no phones, no playgrounds, and

no mattresses on many of the rickety beds. The workers earn, typically, the equivalent of \$2.50 a day, out of which they often must pay a percentage for company social security and pension funds – money, they say, they never see again.

Until this year, salaries were paid not in cash, but in vouchers, which then could be exchanged, with commission taken out, only at the company store. The work is as hard as the pay is bad: The workers stretch and bend for about 12 hours per day in the tropical sun, cutting down the cane, stripping off the leaves, chopping it into small pieces, and piling it up. They wear no protective gear and must buy their own machetes – and pay for sharpening them.

Boss men on horseback come to check on their progress. Tractors drive up every few hours to take the cut cane to a processing plant.

There are no breaks here. Still, the situation is better than what many Haitians face back home. Haiti, a country of eight million, is about half the size of the Dominican Republic, which has roughly the same population. Haiti is the poorest country in the Western hemisphere. Its Gross National Product – a measurement of the goods and services the country's citizens produce – is less than one-quarter that of the Dominican Republic. Unemployment stands at roughly 75 percent – compared with 17 percent in the Dominican Republic.

Political instability in Haiti and increasing violence in the capital over the last few

years have pushed more Haitians into the Dominican Republic. An estimated 800,000 to 1 million Haitians live here today, most of them illegally. That's nearly one in nine of all Haitians who live on Hispaniola, the island Haiti shares with the Dominican Republic.

At the very beginning, the labor force on these plantations was predominantly Dominican peasants who, because of the availability of alternatives, could expect fair wages. But an 1884 slump in sugar prices resulted in a wage freeze and a subsequent labor shortage that was quickly filled by immigrants: first by Cocolos from Britain's West Indies colonies, and later Haitians.

As Haitians became the major labor force on the plantations, the Dominican Republic began entering into bilateral agreements with its neighbor to ensure the continued supply of these seasonal workers. Cane-cutting begins in January and lasts through July.

In the 1960s, the Dominican Sugar Council (Consejo Estatal del Azúcar) was tasked with



Shacks for the sugar-cane workers

recruiting, by force if need be, the necessary cane cutters for each harvest from across the border. Even so, the Dominican government continued to engage in large-scale summary deportations, expelling Haitians from the country at the end of the sugar-cane harvest – sometimes right before payday.

It's a practice that continues: Companies threaten to "call immigration" on workers if they complain or try to organize unions.

Sonson Kadisa has been working the sugar fields for three years, since he was 12. He sold his family goat back in Haiti to pay for passage here, praying he could find work and send home cash to help his destitute family.

He sucks on sugar cane for breakfast, snacks on cane for lunch, and usually eats beans and rice for dinner. He stopped going to school when he was 10.

"I know something is wrong here," he says. "But if we complain, the owners will call immigration on us and then where will we be?"

Father Christopher Hartley, a Roman Catholic priest who ministers to the workers in St. José de los Llanos and has helped move hundreds of families to better living accommodations, says that because of recent media attention and pressure, conditions have improved very slightly in the past year. Wages have risen, cash is paid instead of vouchers, and marginally better school programs are being instated.

"And yet, this is far from good enough," he says. "Very far."

British religious-hate legislation gets toned down

Government is handed an unusual defeat

LONDON, FEB. 4, 2006 (Zenit.org) – A proposed hate law affecting religion was substantially watered down in a rare parliamentary defeat for Britain's Labor government on Tuesday, Jan. 31. In two votes in the Commons the government lost, the first time by 10 votes, the second time by just one vote, reported the *Independent* newspaper the following day.

The Commons voted to accept some significant amendments along the lines of changes asked for when the Racial and Religious Hatred Bill was debated last October in the House of Lords. The bill had proposed to make it an offense to stir up hatred against people on religious grounds; either spoken or written, in public or in private. Originally the law proposed by the government contemplated making insults and abuse an offense, as well as threatening words and behavior. The original proposal also made it an offense even if the person involved had not intended to stir up hatred.

The law as finally passed by Parliament stipulates that for a person to be charged it will have to be shown that "threatening" language or behavior was used, instead of the "threatening, insulting and abusive." It

will also be necessary to prove that there was an intention to commit the offenses. The day Parliament voted on the law several hundred demonstrators gathered outside in protest against what they saw as an unjustified restriction on free speech.

The government had attempted to overcome opposition by accepting last-minute changes to the proposed law, the BBC reported. They accepted demands that incitement to religious hatred be covered by separate legislation rather than be joined to race-hate laws. And somebody could only be convicted if they intended or were reckless about inciting hatred. But the changes were not sufficient to placate critics.

Opposition to the law came from a wide variety of persons and groups. Comedians feared that it would no longer be possible for them to tell religious jokes. Civil rights activists were worried about restrictions on free speech. And a number of religious groups considered the law overly restrictive.

An editorial in the *Guardian* newspaper noted this was the third attempt by the government since 2001 to pass a law on this subject. According to the editorial, the

government's proposal "conflated threatening behavior and material, from which religious people deserve protection, with insult and abuse of religious belief, which is a necessary part of an open society."

Another problem was that it failed to "distinguish properly between the believer, who should not suffer for what he or she is, and the belief, which others must be entitled to attack, question and ridicule, even to the extent of causing offense to believers."

Defending free speech

The Christian Institute, an evangelical group, welcomed the changes made to the law. In a briefing last August it explained its opposition to the proposed law. The institute said the legislation would harm free speech and place governmental and judicial authorities in the position of judging people's religious beliefs.

As well, the institute noted that protection already exists for all people regardless of religion. Under British law it is already a criminal offense to incite a crime against another person, whether or not religion is the cause. And in 2001 Parliament passed laws establishing religiously-aggravated

offenses. Another problem is that some religious groups are litigious, and they could hold the threat of prosecution over the heads of their detractors, the institute warned.

On Jan. 31 a group of humanists, secularists, Muslims and evangelical Christians wrote a letter published in the *Telegraph* newspaper, asking parliamentarians to vote against the law.

Among the signatories to the letter were two Muslims, Ghyasuddin Siddiqui, leader of the Muslim Parliament, and Manzoor Moghal, of the Muslim Forum. Their views contrasted with the stance of the Muslim Council of Britain. That council, generally seen as the country's most representative Islamic body, supported the legislation, according to the *Telegraph*.

"As people with strong views on religion, we know how easy it is to offend those with whom you disagree and how easy it is to resent what others say, and see insult in it," the letter stated. "But we also recognize that a free society must have the scope to debate, criticize, proselytize, insult and even to ridicule belief and religious practices in order to ensure that there is full scope – short

Continued on p. 17...

Women

The women of the world

One of the purposes of this column *Building Trust* is to keep the discussion on the role of women in the Christian Reformed Church alive, until such time that women have a status in the church equal to men. The church has made progress over the past years by giving local churches the option to appoint women in ordained leadership positions in their own congregations. However, the big step we are waiting for is the opportunity for women to serve as voting delegates to the annual synodical meetings. The Christian Reformed Church is still holding off on that, for fear of division in the church.

It is important that the church takes this step soon. The church needs to be a strong witness to the world in the promotion of equal opportunities and justice for all. I say that because the problem of inequality is much broader than the role of women in the church.

Inequality between genders is a major global issue. We know this because we daily see the suffering of the disadvantaged people in the world on television and we also read about it in the newspapers every day. There is no end to the suffering of oppressed people, and especially of women, not only in our western society but also and especially in developing countries. There is also no end either to stories of powerless people permanently scarred because of abuse at the hands of people with greater power.

So, by extension, this column also aims to raise awareness of the role of women in society and in the world. I recently had the opportunity to serve, for the third time, on a medical/dental mission to Ecuador in South America. It was once again an enormous privilege. Twenty-eight poor and crippled people received a new hip or a knee, 11 children had foot or hip surgery and hundreds of school children in remote mountain areas had their teeth fixed. The 44 member team included physicians, nurses, dentists, physiotherapists, a financial manager and several assistants.

We all worked hard and all found it very rewarding. We helped people who would otherwise be crippled for the rest of their lives. The incidence of physical deformities is greater in Ecuador than in our western society. The local custom of carrying babies in a sling on the back causes children to be prone to hip deformities later in life. As well, the fluctuating mountain temperatures cause high incidences of arthritis. It so happened that most of the people we helped were women.

I made an effort to learn something about the lives of women in Ecuador. We had the opportunity to visit a village high up in the Andes to look at a water project. We drove up there with Betty and Rob Wood, representatives of the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee in Ecuador. They live in the capital city of Quito. We spent a wonderful day with them. Their sturdy four-wheel-drive vehicle relentlessly chugged its way up the winding hills of the vast mountain range of



the Andes, where we visited a small Christian village.

We were met by a group of men and women anticipating our arrival. The first thing they did was offer us lunch consisting of three whole, round, boiled potatoes, three boiled eggs and a piece of fried guinea pig on a tin plate. After lunch these wonderful people formed a circle outside and sang for us to the music of guitar.

So we joined them in praising God, high up there in the Andes, surrounded by the beauty of nature and as close to heaven as we will ever get to be. *Alabare* was one hymn we all knew and singing it together in unison vaporized all language and communication barriers. We were one in worshipping God way up there.

Later I heard that women living in the Andes mountains are often illiterate. They may have a couple of years of schooling but no more. Education is more important for men, who are the primary providers for their families. We heard that the guitarist was the literacy instructor who teaches reading and writing to women in the evenings in the basement of the church.

One of the men was the pastor of the church. He showed us the church building, a cold, concrete, somewhat dilapidated structure with a dirt floor and openings for doors and windows. It was lunchtime and sunny on the day we were there. But it felt stone cold in that church. Yet, we knew that God was worshiped there, as evidenced by familiar texts in Spanish on the walls.

I tried to imagine what it would feel like in that building in the evenings in the dark. The village had a small school and we saw children playing. We learned that one teacher teaches all grades. She lives an hour away and walks to school every day. When she can hitch a ride home, she leaves and school is out early for the day. I don't blame her.

The village has electricity but no television reception. It has no running water either. We were shown the end of a pipe, which had clear cool water gushing out of it. It is part of a water project that has run out of money. Seven kilometers of pipe has already been

laid. It starts at a high mountain spring which can be reached only on foot by walking for two hours. Two kilometers of pipe are still needed for the water to get to the village. The trench for the pipe has already been dug and a reservoir is also in place. But the ten thousand dollars to finish the project isn't there yet, and until a donor is found the water just disappears into the ground. That sounds like a small amount of money for a project to benefit many people for a long time to come.

Women living in the Andes spend most of their time caring for children and watching over animals. Many are shepherdesses. Their children and dogs are out in the fields with them. They stand out against the green hills in brightly colored ponchos and long contrasting pleated skirts. Many women earn incomes selling goods on markets, again with their children by their side. Items for sale include handmade craft items, flowers, garden produce or even boiled eggs.

I couldn't speak with the women of Ecuador about their lives because I don't speak Spanish. I observed them though, wondering what they were thinking and feeling. I tried to imagine their life. It's a life close to nature and without books. It would be hard to compare our lives to theirs. I tried to imagine what life would be like without a formal education and

the general knowledge it offers.

Women must be telling their children lots of stories as a way to pass on what they know. I admire their closeness to nature. They live on a vast green mountainside with God's creation and general revelation right on their doorstep every day. One day I want to take the time to learn more about the lives of these women.

I asked about the school curriculum. Everything is very simple I was told, just the basics. I wondered who helps women deliver their babies. Betty Wood, a community health nurse, told me she teaches women to be midwives so that they can help each other. She also distributes maternity packages containing supplies for pregnant women.

"The health needs of the people in the mountains are a priority," she says. "It starts by helping them find a source of clean water, teaching them about nutrition and health, and setting up viable agricultural projects."

Education is the responsibility of the government. In some areas it is adequate, in others it is almost non-existent. The school walls we saw were completely bare of any kind of educational tools. Knowing this, we had brought along wall maps for schools bought with money collected from our Rotary Club in Edmonton. We bought 10 large wall maps for five different schools and also gave \$100 each to three other schools for school supplies. We did all this with money collected at our last Rotary Club Christmas party by simply passing a hat around the room. So little effort on our part and of so much benefit to others.

So, my thinking is that as long as there is inequality in the world, we have to remain passionate about the role of women in the church. I see a connection between the role of women in the church and the role of women in the world. The common bottom line need of both is equality and justice. I hope and pray that the Christian Reformed Church will be able to move forward this year and provide the purposeful leadership this world needs.

Vicky Van Andel is the editor of this column. Anyone who would like to contribute to this column is invited to contact her via e-mail at: vickyv@telus.net

Building Trust

Vicky Van Andel, Ed.



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FEBRUARY 20, 2006

Perspective



Welcome to
my perch
Bert Witvoet

Up, up and away!

Let me tell you about a pleasant experience my wife, Alice, and I had

not long after my official retirement. It was an uplifting experience, come to think of it, and it brought us closer to heaven. In fact, it allowed us to leave behind all earthly cares mainly because we were no longer on earth. No, we had not kicked the bucket, but we were *in* a bucket. My wife and I had embarked on a hot air balloon ride near Dundas, Ontario.

The idea of sending us aloft had come from our children. They liked the idea so much they had financed the experience as an anniversary gift. At first, I didn't know whether to laugh or to cry when we were presented with the envelope, but you don't look a gift horse in the mouth, right? Especially not when it's your own offspring that is donating the horse.

Earlier that summer, I had witnessed a party of three or four people take off in a hot-air balloon in Dundas Municipal Park. The operator of the balloon pulled on a lever that allowed a prolonged burst of fire to lose itself in the vast space of trapped air in the balloon. Quickly, the balloon and suspended basket lifted from the ground and rose into the air. It looked magnificent ... and scary. Little did I suspect that a few months later my wife and I would be

experiencing a similar experience, except this time we were in a basket ourselves, rather than looking at it from the ground.

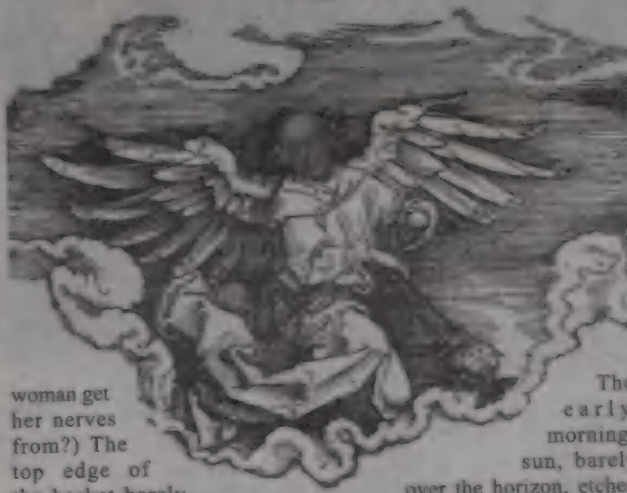
1400 feet above the ground

We lifted off just after sunrise one early morning and very quickly drifted 1400 feet above the ground with a steady force of wind pushing us westward. Actually we didn't feel any wind up there because we were carried along with the breeze. As I looked up into the balloon I got the feeling that I was in a roomy stadium with a huge dome. There was enough room in there to play an official game of soccer, except that the basket we stood in was not much of a playing field.

And then I looked around me and below me. Wow, there was not much to give me a sense of security there.

You have to get used to riding a wicker basket 1400 feet off the ground. The floor of the basket we were riding in was not much bigger than the top of my desk, and there were five of us crammed into the space. I hoped that the plywood floor would not cave in under our collective weight of 700 Canadian pounds. There was not much keeping us from falling into the clutches of gravity.

I confess that I was a bit nervous at the start of the flight. (Not Alice. She was enjoying herself from beginning to end. Where does that



woman get her nerves from?) The top edge of the basket barely

reached to my waist. I always get strange notions when I am near an abyss, thoughts like: "What would happen if I leaned over too far and lost my balance?" "How do I know that I won't be foolish enough to jump?" I usually back away from cliff edges and bridge barriers. My imagination needs a lot of suppression when I am up high somewhere.

Perspective from on high

But after a few minutes aloft in the hot air balloon basket, I began to relax as I realized that there is some resistance in my body to those whims. My muscles don't apparently take orders from wild notions.

The early morning sun, barely over the horizon, etched out the flowing contours of the plowed fields and meadows below us. We noticed deer running through one field and cattle quietly grazing in another, and we heard dogs barking in farmyards below us. They must have seen us coming. It's a strange thing to be flying above a flock of geese, but that's exactly what we were doing. What a different perspective of the world you get as you silently float along (in between noisy bursts of flame to keep the craft at the proper altitude).

As we were gliding along, I wondered why the Creator had not outfitted us with wings in the first place. Did God forget that little detail when he formed us out of dust? With the milkman Tevye in the *Fiddler on the Roof*, I felt like complaining, "Would it have been so much trouble for the Almighty to improve our mode of mobility by sprouting a few wings from our shoulders?" Life could be so enjoyable, so freeing! Leaving the ground is like leaving all your cares behind.

Of course, if all of us could fly, we would lose a lot of privacy on the ground. No more skinny dipping in the backyard pool. No more dumping of junk behind the shed.

That reality hit home to me as the balloon started to descend near Brantford. We ended up flying only a few hundred feet above back yards and garage sales. I almost bought a second-hand radio on the fly. If we had been nasty, we could have dropped a few items on people walking their dogs. Pay them back for dropping stuff on our lawns.

God knew what he was doing

Come to think it, we might be a

lot less safe if people could approach us from above. How do you cross a street under those circumstances? Look left, look right, look up? Homeland security would become a nightmare for George Bush. And for those flying, they would have to look in all directions to avoid bumping into things. How do you keep to your lane?

Ah, let's leave the flying to the birds. They seem to know what they are doing. Birds can see in all directions because of the placement of their eyes. We were meant to perambulate. God knew what he was doing when he planted our feet on the ground and told us to cultivate the soil.

Which is not to say that I don't appreciate catching a ride in an airplane or a hot air balloon. But these activities should remain the exception. If we all start leaving the ground at the same time, we would be in an awful mess. Imagine, 30 million Canadians floating through the skies, doing their shopping Saturday mornings. Mary Poppins, here we come.

While scanning a Dutch newspaper on the Internet the other day, I read how a low-flying hot air balloon scared a flock of sheep and lambs into a ditch (a lot of fields in Holland are bordered not by fences but by ditches). About a dozen lambs drowned.

I imagine the sound of the burner scared the living day lights out of them. I bet the farmer was none too happy about that! It goes to show you that there is something unnatural about people pretending to be birds.

Riding a hot air balloon is a liberating experience. It gives you an unusual perspective of the world we take so much for granted. You tend to see the bigger picture, literally and figuratively. You realize how fragile your life is. You can test your character by overcoming fears. You can't help admiring the beauty of our world. You marvel at the way God allows us to use the forces of nature for our own advantage.

But you also realize that God meant us to spend most of our time on terra firma, helping each other cope with the physical and spiritual forces of gravity. A propane tank has limited capacity and will bring you down to earth again in fairly short time. In our case, it was in a baseball park next to the Wayne Gretzky arena in Brantford.

British religious-hate legislation ... continued from p. 15

of violence or inciting violence or other criminal offenses – to tackle these issues."

When the bill was debated last October in the House of Lords, numerous press articles pointed out problems with the legislation. On Oct. 12 the *Guardian* reported that one Protestant evangelical group, Christian Voice, warned that it would consider using the new law to prosecute bookshops selling the Koran for inciting religious hatred.

Australia's experience

On Oct. 23 the *Sunday Times* reported that witches and Satanists could use it to trigger police investigations of their critics. This was no empty warning, the article reported, citing a case in Australia. In fact, the Australian experiment with religious hate laws has been widely cited by opponents. In December 2003 the first case was heard in the state of Victoria under

the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001.

The Islamic Council of Victoria filed a complaint about statements made by evangelical pastors Danny Nalliah and Daniel Scot during a March 2002 seminar. In December 2003, Judge Michael Higgins found the two had made fun of Muslim beliefs.

Last June 22, the judge ordered the pastors to print public apologies in newspapers and on their Web site. The judge observed that the two pastors had passionate religious beliefs which he thought caused them to break the law. "That does not excuse their conduct," he said, "but does go some way to explain why they acted as they did."

In a commentary published July 4 in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Emily Maguire noted that the group the pastors belong to, Catch the Fire, is undeniably hostile to Islam, and that the declarations made

by them were deeply offensive to many Muslims.

Nevertheless, she argued that the freedom to criticize religion is important. Moreover, "silencing such speech creates martyrs, while giving the views a thorough airing allows response," Maguire wrote. The pastors later appealed the decision.

The following month a senior Victorian judge called for changes to the state's law on religious vilification, the *Herald-Sun* reported Aug. 2. Judge Stuart Morris' comments came as he dismissed a lawsuit launched by a convicted sex offender and self-proclaimed witch. Robin Fletcher had claimed the Salvation Army's Alpha Christianity course, offered in jails, discriminated against him on the ground of his Wiccan religion. The volatile mix of free speech and religion might be bubbling for quite some time.

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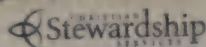
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For tickets please call 905 775 3701

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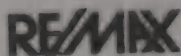
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Classifieds

Anniversaries

1956 March 7 2006

Psalm 127: 7
Unless the LORD builds the house
the weary builders toil in vain.

Blessed by God,

RALPH AND GELMINA REINDERS

hope to celebrate their
50th Wedding Anniversary
with their children and grandchildren

Betty & Rick Stahlbaum, *Kitchener, ON*
Kathleen, Olivia
Helen & Nick Kuipery, *Acton, ON*
Nicole, Mike
Mike Reinders, *Acton, ON*
Harry & Henrietta Reinders, *Rockwood, ON*
Shannon, Amanda, Nathan, Jared, Kirk
Fred Reinders, *Rockwood, ON*
Jason & Lisa Reinders, *Georgetown, ON*

Open House will be held on
Friday, March 10, 2006 from 7 - 9 p.m.
at Blue Spring Golf Course,
Dublin Line, Acton
Best wishes only please.

Home address: RR#1 Guelph ON N1H 6H7
(519) 833-2041



Congratulations,
Mom and Dad/Oma and Opa,
on your **50th Wedding Anniversary**.
May God continue to keep you
in his loving care.

With love from your family,

Bill & Tricia Dodds - Lauren, Alexandra, Ada, MI
Fred & Arlene Bennink - Aaron, Kaitlin, Meagan, Ancaster, ON
David & Fran Bennink - PJ, Carrie, Alayna, Billy, Connor, Ethan, Downingtown, PA
John & Sharon Dykhouse - Karilyn, Courtney, Taylor, Chase, Grand Rapids, MI

Home address: Suite#215 - 275 Main St E Grimsby ON L3M 5N8

1956 March 11 2006

WILLIAM AND AGNES BENNIK

With praise and thanksgiving
we acknowledge that

"The LORD is good and
his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues
to all generations."
(Psalm 100:5)

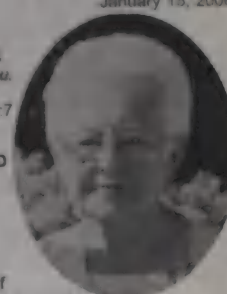


Obituaries

Aalten, The Netherlands
January 28, 1927Brampton, Ontario, Canada
January 15, 2006

Be at rest once more, O my soul,
for the LORD has been good to you.

Psalm 116:7

HANNA (Joan) WESTERVELD
(nee Rensink)

Predeceased by
her loving husband, Henk.

Dear mother and grandmother of
John & Irene Westerveld, *Limehouse, ON*
Nathan, Michael (Charlene), Steven, Daryl
Herb & Michele Westerveld, *Caledon, ON*
Lisa & David deKleer, Paul (Amy), Tina (James)
Dave Westerveld, *Caledon, ON*

Dear sister of
Annie Ebberts, *Aalten, The Netherlands*
Gerda & Johan Nyman, *Wellington, ON*

Dear sister-in-law of
Dien Bussink, *Brantford, ON*
Drika Houwers, *Lichtenvoorde, The Netherlands*
Jan & Wanda Westerveld, *Aalten, The Netherlands*

Predeceased by brothers Henk and Jan

Correspondence: John Westerveld
12968 Fifth Line RR1, Limehouse ON L0P 1H0

The Lord is gracious and righteous,
our God is full of compassion. Psalm 116:5
January 14, 1927 - January 26, 2006
Our Lord in his infinite wisdom, mercy and love,
suddenly called home

PATRICIA HIEMSTRA (Zekveld)

Beloved wife of Andy Hiemstra for nearly 52 years.
Dear mother, grandmother and great-grandmother of:
Nellie & John Bos - Joanna, Michael, Ottawa, ON

Margaret & Herman Zwart, Bowmanville, ON

Patricia, Adrian, Calvin, Monica

Helen & Len Hordyk, Listowel, ON

John, Jaclyn, Daniel, David, Suzanne, Robert, Patrick

Art & Marsha Hiemstra, Peterborough, ON

Alysha & daughter Heaven Millward, Christopher & Amanda, Ashley

Dear sister and aunt of: Helena & John Wybenga, Smithville, ON

Arie & Martina Zekveld, Norwich, ON

John & May Zekveld, Bowmanville, ON

Jacob & Aida Zekveld, Carleton Place, ON

nieces and nephews

Predeceased by: Gilbert and Bertie Zekveld
and by George and Dorothy Zekveld

Funeral service was held on Tuesday, January 31, 2006 in the
Rehoboth Christian Reformed Church, Bowmanville at 11:00.
Rev. Harry Salomons officiating.

Correspondence: Andy Hiemstra, RR 1 Bowmanville ON L1C 3K2

1956 Lethbridge, Alberta

February 24

Calgary, Alberta

Ruth 1:16

With joyful hearts and
gratitude to the Lord,
we announce the
50th Wedding Anniversary
of our parents:

PETER AND MARJORIE
NIEUWENHUIS
(nee Vander Molen)

With love from your children
and grandchildren:

Sid & Joanne Nieuwenhuis
Andrew, Jolene, Tymen
St. Albert, Alberta
George & Jane Nieuwenhuis
Daniel, Ruth, Esther, Lisa
Calgary, Alberta
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Lacombe, Alberta
Martha & Tom Albaugh
Ben, Libbie, Christy, Tim
Vergennes, Vermont

Home address:
4841 Graham Dr SW
Calgary Alberta T3E 4L3



Obituaries

Woubrugge, October 16, 1922 Jordan Station, January 23, 2006

The LORD is my light and my salvation: whom shall I fear

CHRISTIAAN VANDERNAGEL

Peacefully, at his home the Lord took to himself my beloved
husband of Grace and

Dear father of Joanne & Hank Haaksma,
Noel VanderNagel, Janet & Henry Knoop,
Aloe & Kees Verhoef, Marilyn & Peter Leder,
Betty & Larry Dirksen, Sheila & Jim Caminha.
Also survived by 18 grandchildren, 16 great-grandchildren
as well as a sister Mrs. Ven Dorp in Holland.

The funeral was held at Vineland Cemetery and
memorial service at Jubilee Fellowship CRC
in St. Catharines on January 27, 2006
led by Pastor Duane VanderLaan.

Home address: Box 203, Jordan Station ON L0R 1S0

MINEKE VANDERMEULEN August 6, 1929 - December 26, 2005
(nee van der Maas)**MEINE VANDERMEULEN** May 12, 1927 - January 11, 2006

Accept one another as Christ has accepted you for the glory of God.
Romans 15:7

Mineke, of Royal City Manor Nursing Home, and Meine, at his
home, both in Vancouver, British Columbia, passed away within
weeks of each other, to be reunited before the Lord.

They will be deeply missed, and are remembered as much
beloved parents by Yolanda, Wendy, and Cindy. They are also a
profound loss to their sons-in-law Herb, Graham and Doug, their
five grandchildren Tasha, Kristy, Jacqueline, Rachel, and Lindsay,
as well as to their brothers, sisters and families.

The support and prayers offered by friends from Mineke's and
Meine's families: the Christian Reformed Churches in Mon-
treal, Quebec and Kingston, Ontario, and most recently, the New
Westminster CRC, are profoundly appreciated.

Funeral services were held at the First Christian Reformed
Church of New Westminster

Correspondence: Yolanda van Hockauf, 1667 - 57th St Delta BC V4L 1Y5
604-943-8709 yvonhockauf@dcnet.com



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50th anniversary

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Classifieds / Job Opportunities

**Pastor of Development
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EMMANUEL CRC in Calgary, Alberta is seeking a second full-time pastor who will be responsible for encouraging, enabling and empowering our ministry leaders as well as building our presence in the community. Send inquiries/resume to

Search Committee
Emmanuel CRC
3020 - 51 Street SW
Calgary AB Canada T3E 6S7
or e-mail us at ecrc@telusplanet.net

Preschool Children's Pastor
(infant through age 4)

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Ministry Job Opportunities

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Ms. Brenda Dyas,
min2seaf@colba.net
or PO Box 815
Place d'Armes
Montreal Quebec H2Y 3J2
Fax 514 849-2874

**PASTOR/DIRECTOR
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of Edina, Minnesota

is seeking a second, full-time pastor, who will be responsible for creating and supervising designated ministries and building community for all people in its church family.

A complete description of the position and further information are available at the church website, calvarycrc.net, or contact the church by telephone at

952-831-6264.

**Youth & Education Director
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**PACIFIC CHRISTIAN SECONDARY
SCHOOL**

is seeking a

Special Education Coordinator.



Applicants must be committed Christians

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- Coordination and direction of staff

Please forward a resume, a Pastor's reference and statement of faith to:

David O' Dell, Secondary Principal
Pacific Christian Secondary School
654 Agnes Street, Victoria BC V8Z 2E6
Phone: (250) 479-4532
Fax: (250) 479-3511
Email: dodell@pacificchristian.ca

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is an inter-denominational school established to serve the Dresden and Wallaceburg and surrounding area. This is a school of 75 students served by a great staff of dedicated teachers and supported by 42 families. We are looking for a new teaching principal who has a vision for leading a small school to future growth and striving for excellence in Christian education. Interested individuals should send their resumes, statement of faith, references and philosophy of education to:

Wallaceburg Christian School
Principal Search Committee
693 Albert St.
Wallaceburg ON N8A 1Y8

**Secondary School
Maternity Leave
Position**

PACIFIC CHRISTIAN SECONDARY SCHOOL has a maternity leave position available beginning May 1st, 2006 and continuing until April 30, 2007, with the possibility of extending until June 30, 2007.



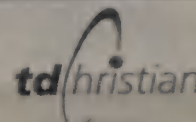
The position is **Learning Assistance Coordinator** for grades 8-12.

The position involves 50% classroom teaching and 50% coordinating of the Secondary L.A. Program. Qualifications include: BCCT certification, experience teaching students with learning disabilities at the secondary school level; ability to liaise with parents, students, teachers, and community resource people; experience in applying for adjudication for provincial exams; experience reading and utilizing psychological-educational assessments; experience in developing and implementing student IEPs.

Qualified applicants should send a cover letter, resume, at least two letters of reference and their statement of faith to:

David O' Dell, Secondary Principal
Pacific Christian Secondary School
654 Agnes Street
Victoria BC V8Z 2E6
Phone: (250) 479-4532
Fax: (250) 479-3511
Email: dodell@pacificchristian.ca

Closing date for applications will be March 10, 2006.

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More job opportunities on page 21

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Classifieds / Job Opportunities



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To learn more about a position and receive application materials, qualified persons committed to a Reformed, biblical perspective and educational philosophy are encouraged to send a letter of interest and curriculum vita/resume to:

Dr. Rockne McCarthy

Facsimile: 712 722-4496

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E-mail: vpaa@dordt.edu

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rklassen@mutualsupport.net
www.mutualsupport.net



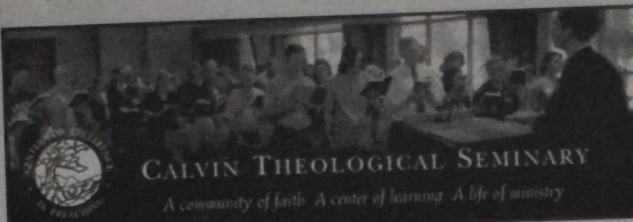
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CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

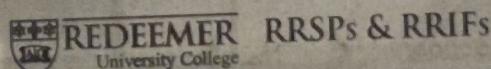
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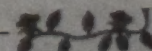
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Events/Advertising

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Feb. 26 Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Peter VanEgmond will be preaching.

Mar 10, 11 The Woodstock Dutch Theatre Groep presents "Gasten in Eigen Huis" at Market Centre Theatre, **Woodstock**. See ad this page for more details.

Mar 24 The Woodstock Dutch Theatre Groep presents "Gasten in Eigen Huis" 8 p.m. at Heritage Christian School, **Jordan**. See ad this page for more details.

Apr 7 The **Liberation Choir** in Concert with the students of Holland Marsh District Christian School on Friday at 7.30 p.m. Springdale Christian Reformed Church, 1351 River Road, **Bradford**, Ont. For tickets please call 905 775 3701

Apr 7-9 Reformed Marriage Encounter Weekend at the Travel Lodge **Kingston**. For more information or to register call: Jamie and Wilma Kulyk 905-987-4272 or E-mail james.kulyk@sympatico.ca See this issue.

Apr 8 The **Liberation Choir** and Living Rock Ministries team up for a Benefit Concert on Saturday 7.30 p.m. Central Presbyterian Church, 150 Charlton Ave (corner of Caroline and Charlton) **Hamilton** Ont. Tickets: \$15.00 ea. For tickets please call 905 528 ROCK (7825). www.livingrock.ca

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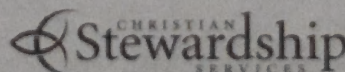
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News

How one mine could save a Romanian town

Are development and environment inevitably at odds?

Mark Lange

SAN FRANCISCO — Can economic development enhance environmental quality? That's the big question being worked out in the tiny village of Rosia Montana in Romania — a place of enormous natural beauty and grinding poverty, atop one of the largest gold deposits in the world. And that's the challenge, as mining practices employed from the regimes of Caesar through Ceaucescu have left the region's people washing their kitchen garden vegetables — and watching their children play in a river running red with toxic tailings.

As a reasonable condition of Romania's entry into the EU on Jan. 1, 2007, the unsustainable state-run mine will be shut down. With unemployment in the area at 50 percent — and expected to rise to over 90 percent when the mine closes — the consequences are severe.

So, too, is the environmental impact, as Romania lacks the resources to clean up Rosia's soil and water supply, and the EU could only put the site toward the end of a list of hundreds.

Enter Gabriel Resources, a Canadian company petitioning the Romanian government for permission to develop a new mine at Rosia. In contrast to the environmentally destructive Freeport-McMoRan — which contracted the Indonesian military to cordon off a corner of Papua and perpetuate its mining abuses — Gabriel proposes to submit an independent environmental and social impact assessment by a Romanian and international panel, bring in the best modern technology, operate to standards that meet or exceed those of Romania and the EU, and fund the cleanup of 2,000 years of uncontrolled mining. Total investment would be more than \$770 million, with revenue to Romanian companies exceeding \$1 billion.

You'd imagine such a prospect would prompt a spirited and serious exchange of ideas. But when Gabriel tried to enter the forum with a TV ad explaining its intentions, activists from the antimine NGO Alburnus Maior filed a complaint with Romania's National Council for media, declaring Gabriel's ad "immoral" and petitioning to have it pulled and the stations running it fined. While the National Council rejected that claim 9 to 1, Alburnus drove mass e-mail into affiliates of the Discovery Channel and National Geographic, which eventually pulled the ad.

If you think economic development and environmental protection are inevitably at odds, you're in good company. When hung up in frames of vivid con-

flict, such goals tend to clash in the black-hat/white-hat game that funds activists' grants, feeds Nielsen ratings, and draws advertising into adversary-hungry media. Along the way, some people have accepted the misperception that there's an inherent trade-off between economic growth and environmental integrity, when in fact they can be mutually reinforcing.

Here's how: Wealthy, democratic nations have the means to make better environmental choices. They can support a mature regulatory regime and sophisticated enforcement, and can afford the advanced technology to avert environmental degradation that poorer nations can't. And nations that protect their environmental assets reap economic rewards: While the forests of impoverished Haiti were stripped for fuel wood, the adjoining Dominican Republic preserved its environment and prospered. In Botswana and Zimbabwe, wildlife ventures have proved more profitable than cattle ranching.

Good intentions exercised irresponsibly can be even more damaging than disengagement. In Romania's case, applying censorship is an irony as toxic to free exchange as the river that runs like a red scar through Rosia Montana. The romantic prospect of "saving" a highly intelligent but impoverished people from development will have unintended consequences affecting generations there, and reinforce exactly the wrong approach in developing regions around the world.

Absent Gabriel, Rosia will be deprived of the only economic engine that can reclaim its environment. There is no Romanian Superfund.

No project like this comes without costs. A lot of earth — and in some cases, the people on it — would have to move to make it happen. As Americans were reminded last month, mining can be a dangerous business. But so is cutting off the exchange of ideas and capital in a region of the world desperate for both. Rather than assume we have to destroy a village's economy to save its ecology, allow the citizens of Romania to weigh their alternatives, and determine their economic and environmental future. They have a chance for the best of both.

** Mark Lange is a former presidential speechwriter and a student of public policy.*



Old mining company in Romania

News briefs

The distractible brain

Some bad news that struck me as good news. According to the results of a recent study on aging and the brain, as we get older it becomes increasingly hard for us to concentrate because of changes in the functioning of our grey matter. It happens in middle age. Our brains become more susceptible to distractions.

This came as good news to me, because I thought my ability to concentrate has been deteriorating recently. According to this study, the process began some 20 years ago. Perhaps something has happened to sharpen my perceptions in recent years so that I have only begun to notice it lately.

With all the attention devoted to Attention Deficit Disorder on school kids, I had begun to think that being easily distracted was something you grew out of. Turns out, I was wrong.

MRI brain scans showed that in young adults, activity in the area of the brain associated with tasks that require concentration (memory, for instance) goes up when called upon, while activity in other regions linked to unrelated areas of thought goes down. Starting in middle age, those surrounding areas, it seems, refuse to turn off to the same degree to allow your blood to supply oxygen to the focus area. Result: a nosier office up there, more bats in the belfry.

So if you're going to do something that requires a lot of concentration, better hustle. There's only a small window between ADD and middle age.

But if you're in your 60's like me, there is hope. Somehow the brain compensates for its lack of oxygen to the head office. Those who exercise their brains on a regular basis, say by reading challenging papers like this one, seem to be able to overcome the impediment.

The researchers say it also helps to turn off the radio and t.v. when you're trying to concentrate on something like doing your income taxes.

Who'd have thought of that?

Of course, by most cultural indicators most people in our society are only too happy to be distracted; in fact, they often concentrate most on the distractions. Concentrate too much and you're liable to discover that you've forgotten what it was all about.

Planning your memoirs?

Beware all memoirists: you may be called to account. We're all memoirists to some extent, for we all at some point tell stories about what happened to us in the dim past. Even if it's a good story to start with, who can resist the temptation to make it a little better?

The memoir *A Million Little Pieces* written by a former drug addict James Frey shot to stardom after it was recommended by Oprah. Recently he appeared on Oprah again and was forced to admit that he had made a lot of his memoir up or at least "improved" on it. Although he hadn't actually been driven to the extreme of robbing a bank, he confessed, he had seriously thought of it.

Poor fellow. I suspect most of the memoirs and autobiographies written ought to be taken with a grain of salt. Telling the truth about oneself is not something that comes naturally. It demands a naked honesty as well as considerable art. The two often clash.

And memory often plays tricks on us. I have a distinct memory of being a hockey star in my youth. Unfortunately, I didn't learn how to skate until into my teens, and to safeguard my hockey stick I wrapped it in so much tape the blade looked like a huge cucumber.

Maybe I ought to leave that part about being a hockey star out of my memoirs....